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ABSTRACT

The reasons why undereducated individuals choose not to participate in adult education were examined in a comparative, qualitative case study that was conducted in eight nonmetropolitan sites (including the pilot site) in diverse economic regions across Kentucky. Data were collected from the following sources: in-depth interviews with 84 adults (10-15 at each site) who had not chosen to participate in adult education; 4 focus group interviews; and 5 informational interviews. Key findings included the following: (1) adult education programs compete directly with everyday priorities such as work, family, and community responsibilities; (2) the public perceives adult education as General Educational Development (GED) certificate preparation; (3) undereducated adults often do not perceive the GED as an appropriate goal; and (4) there is no single marketing campaign that will reach the diverse population of undereducated nonparticipants in adult education. It was concluded that, to be more effective, adult education providers must assume a client-centered philosophy of practice that respects prior experience, prioritizes relevant content, and emphasizes a problem-solving approach to learning. Eighteen implications for program providers, professional development consultants, and policymakers were identified, along with four areas for further study. (Appended are the following: study methodology; interview protocol; and quantitative results. The bibliography contains 44 references.) (MN)

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Reasonable Choices

Understanding Why Under-Educated Individuals Choose Not to Participate in Adult Education

Summary Report for
The Department for Adult Education & Literacy

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Executive Summary

This project is a continuance of an innovative grant submitted by Dr. Lois Adams-Rogers in 1997. As a result of that work, we were asked to design a study that would help the Department for Adult Education & Literacy gain an understanding of the motivations and obstacles that influence educational decision-making among individuals who have not attended a GED or literacy program or who have not reached their educational goals. This report summarizes the findings of a comparative, qualitative case study conducted in seven non-metropolitan sites.

This research was driven by the following questions: Why do some under-educated adults choose not to pursue adult education or literacy training? What kinds of internal and external motivations affect these decisions? How do economic opportunities or constraints affect educational decision-making? How do local attitudes toward schooling affect perceptions of adult education? How are these attitudes similar or different in different parts of the state?

Our results indicate the following:

- adult education programs directly compete with everyday priorities including work, family, and community responsibilities in complex ways;
- adult education is perceived by the public as GED preparation with the accompanying stigma of being "school-like" ;
- the GED is often not considered an appropriate goal by under-educated adults and therefore not valued;
- alternative forms of certification to the GED are desirable;
- the population of under-educated individuals in the state is not only demographically diverse (age, gender, and geographic location), but also has diverse work and educational experiences requiring a mix of program offerings;
- there is no one marketing campaign that will reach this diverse population;
- to be more effective, adult education providers must assume a client-centered philosophy of practice that respects prior experience, prioritizes relevant content, and emphasizes a problem-solving approach to learning.

Implications for Program Providers

- Because under-educated adults are often uncertain of either their abilities, the benefits of educational certification, or both, program staff are the most important factor in helping participants decide if adult education is right for them or not
- Be aware that students share their experiences, good and bad, with friends and neighbors. Satisfied students are the best marketing tools.
- Counsel rather than test. When assessment instruments are necessary, provide support to the student to interpret the experience positively. Delay academic assessment if necessary to avoid student discomfort.
- Where possible avoid "school-like" practices, especially those that reduce the student's sense of personal autonomy.
- Coordinate your program with other social services. Adult education is often perceived in the same light as welfare reform and workforce development; if those programs are perceived negatively, yours may be too.
- Learn as well as teach. Share the authority of the classroom with your students so that they feel ownership of the learning space.
- Work with each student to find a goal that is relevant to his or her life and to the local economic context. Where the economy is not strong, students may be interested in working collaboratively to strengthen family and community resources.
- Do not assume that students who do not participate lack educational values or motivation.
- A successful program requires understanding what is happening for the student and potential student outside the classroom as well as inside.

Implications for Professional Development Consultants

- Assist providers in challenging stereotypes about under-educated adults—both their own assumptions and those of others in their communities.
- Support structured professional development for all instructors and volunteers that emphasizes:
  - understanding how adults learn (as opposed to children),
  - creating locally-based teaching and learning tools (as opposed to teaching to the test), and
  - recognizing diverse learning styles and learning disabilities.
- Help providers make best use of local resources and make connections with community services such as welfare reform and employment programs.
- Support initiatives in which providers work with other community organizations (churches, non-profit groups, business organizations, and post-secondary institutions) to define alternative credentials to the GED.

Implications For Policy Makers

- Recognize that adult education is perceived in negative as well as positive ways.
- Redefine a lack of participation in adult education as a lack of interest in your product rather than a lack of interest in education.
- Develop a strategic marketing plan to change the way that adult education is perceived.
- Find alternative certification to the GED that will satisfy employer needs as well as individual goals for self-improvement.
- Find alternatives to traditional program formats that center on the GED by prioritizing civic capacity building (expanding democratic participation in local governance and development) and the building of learning communities.

Areas for Further Study

Program Climate

Individual providers need to assess their sites and curricula for relevance to their locality. It is especially important to examine the ways adult education settings are "school-like" and to recognize that such practices may dissuade some clients from participating.

Media & Distance Learning

A few of our respondents volunteered information about their television viewing habits. While KET ("the Barney Channel") was acknowledged as educational they also mentioned other informational entertainment channels (i.e. the Discovery Channel) as sources of self-improvement. Local adult education programs might be able to find ways to capitalize on interest in television programming above and beyond that provided through KET. The same might be true for radio programming. Further research into media consumption patterns is necessary.

Curriculum & Workplace Credentials

Many of our respondents acknowledged that increasing their educational credentials would benefit them at work, but asserted that work had to take precedence over education in order for them to survive financially. Further research into cooperative education programs for adult learners similar to those found in post-secondary and vocational education programs may offer solutions to this tension. Math and computer literacy are also areas requiring further research.

Alternative Certification

Further research that explores alternatives to the GED as a required credential is also indicated. Many of the individuals who participated in this study clearly believed the GED to be an inappropriate workplace requirement given the kinds of labor in which they typically engaged. These individuals challenged the traditional view of the GED as a commodity. There is a need for additional research that explores alternatives pathways to workplace credentialing that may include a continuum of post-secondary educational experiences.

Introduction

This research project originated with a request by the Kentucky Department for Adult Education and Literacy to investigate why individuals lacking a high school diploma or GED choose not to pursue educational opportunities. Educational achievement statistics indicate that approximately 36% of adults in Kentucky have not completed high school or the GED (closer to 50% in some regions) and that adult education programs in the state are serving only 5% of their potential market. Regardless of the accuracy of these figures, clearly adult education and literacy programs are under-utilized in the state. The following report summarizes the findings generated by a mixed-method research study of undereducated adults in seven rural sites across Kentucky. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the motivations and obstacles that influence educational decision-making among adults without high school diplomas or the equivalent.

This study reveals that undereducated adults--including both former and potential adult education clients--frequently hold oversimplified assumptions about adult education programs. These assumptions often prevent them from entering adult education programs and at other times cause clients to leave programs before reaching their goals. The following assumptions about adult education programs were among those held by respondents:

- Adult education classes will be like earlier school experiences.
- Successful completion of the GED requires previous educational success.
- The GED exam is hard (or easy), but without a sense of what it entails.
- If you did poorly in school, you will do poorly in adult education classes.
- The GED is the ultimate goal of adult education classes.

Many of the adults who participated in this study held one or more of these assumptions about adult education. Although our respondents did not always know where or when classes are offered, they almost always knew how to find out. Clearly, it was not a lack of awareness of adult education programs that has kept them from participating. Instead, their decisions were based on an assessment of the efficacy of formal adult education for their lives.

Almost all our study participants perceived the GED as the ultimate goal of adult education programming. Indeed, it became clear during the research process that adult education and GED acquisition were commonly considered one and the same. This may be a legacy, in Kentucky, of adult education's previous relationship with the Department of Education. Despite organizational and policy changes, this perspective is still very much a part of public perceptions of adult education by both

the haves and the have nots. Although most of the programs in the counties we studied also offered literacy tutoring and other educational opportunities, preparing for the GED was perceived to be the primary activity. In addition, most individuals with whom we spoke (those with educational credentials and without) referred to formal adult education programming as GED preparation.

While we found that our respondents often held oversimplified assumptions about adult education programs, we also discovered that many community leaders, social service practitioners and, unfortunately, adult education providers also hold stereotypical assumptions about undereducated adults. The following statements are examples of what we heard in the research sites with regard to under-educated adults:

- They do not value education.
- They do not recognize that "education pays" in important ways.
- They do not recognize the need for educational credentials.
- They do not participate in adult education programs because of shame or fear.
- They do not participate in adult education programs because they are "lazy" or "unmotivated".
- The GED is the most appropriate goal for all undereducated adults.

While there is a certain degree of validity to each of these assumptions--at least for some people and some of the time--an uncritical acceptance of them often leads providers and policy makers to erroneous conclusions about the needs and goals of adult learners.

The danger inherent in operating from unexamined assumptions lies in the likelihood that when these assumptions go unquestioned, they are accepted as "truths" when in fact they provide an incomplete and often misleading understanding of the needs and goals of undereducated adults. Furthermore, a lack of education often puts individuals in vulnerable positions, unable to question or challenge policies and practices based on stereotypes and misconceptions. Close attention to these assumptions can prevent misunderstandings between program providers and potential clients and guide policy makers to more appropriate adult education program offerings.

The Research Design

This study represents an innovative research approach using interpretive qualitative methods and theoretically guided analysis. Our research is based on in-depth interviews that allow respondents to describe their experiences in their own words. A research design using qualitative methods is one of discovery rather than the confirmation of existing knowledge and is therefore well suited to our task. Although we did not begin our research with hypotheses to be tested, our research was based on the following principles regarding adult education:

- Adult learners make educational decisions based on personal and social-historical values; thus, a contextual analysis that focuses on individual perspectives is imperative.
- Adult learners incorporate their knowledge and experience of local economic conditions into individual educational decision-making strategies; an understanding of the local economy is thus necessary.
- Adult learners and adult education providers frequently view and value educational experiences differently; it is therefore important to recognize the validity of these multiple perspectives on adult education.

The perspectives of adult learners are central to this study and the research design using qualitative methods emphasizes this centrality. Fingeret (1989) points out "the traditional literacy education model places skills at the center and implies a hierarchical relationship between educators (who know the skills) and students (who 'need' to learn the skills)" (p. 5). While such a perspective is common, it fails to acknowledge the important role adult learners play as rational consumers of adult education and literacy programs.

Site Selection

Kentucky is a rural state. Most policy decisions, however, are made in the metropolitan region of central Kentucky. In contrast, our research was conducted in seven non-metropolitan, rural counties. At the request of the DAEL, we also included a metropolitan county as an example of a "commuter" area, but were unable to collect interviews in that site. Our data, therefore, includes the perspectives of individuals living in rural areas and may be different from the experiences and observations of practitioners who serve urban and suburban populations. The US Department of Agriculture designates 98 of Kentucky's 120 counties as rural;

therefore, we believe that this study has much to add to our understanding of the state's needs outside of metropolitan areas. Table One identifies the regional and economic characteristics of Kentucky's counties.

Table One: Site Selection Matrix

Economic Type	Western Kentucky	Central Kentucky	Eastern Kentucky
Farming	Breckenridge, Carlisle, McLean	Casey, Larue, Green, Robertson, Spencer, Washington	None
Mining	Hopkins, Livingston, Muhlenberg, Ohio, Union, Webster	None	Bell, Breathitt, Clay, Floyd, Harlan, Knott, Leslie, Letcher, Magoffin, Martin, Perry, Pike
Manufacturing	Allen, Ballard, Barren, Butler, Graves, Grayson, Hancock, Logan, Marshall, Monroe, Simpson, Todd	Anderson, Boyle, Carroll, Harrison, Mason, Mercer, Nelson, Nicholas, Russell, Shelby, Taylor, Wayne	None
Government	Edmonson, Hardin, Lyon	Franklin, McCreary	Elliott, Menifee, Owsley, Rowan, Wolfe
Services	McCracken	Pulaski, Trimble	Johnson, Lawrence, Lee, Whitley
Nonspecialized	Caldwell, Calloway, Crittenden, Fulton, Hickman, Meade, Trigg, Warren,	Adair, Bath, Bracken, Clinton, Cumberland, Garrard, Hart, Henry, Lincoln, Marion, Metcalfe, Owen, Rockcastle,	Estill, Fleming, Jackson, Knox, Laurel, Lewis, Montgomery, Morgan, Powell
Metropolitan	Christian, Henderson, Daviess,	Bullitt, Jefferson, Oldham, Fayette, Jessamine, Madison, Woodford, Scott, Clark, Bourbon, Boone, Kenton, Campbell, Grant, Pendleton, Gallatin	Boyd, Carter, Greenup,

The seven rural sites were chosen based on economic profiles defined by the USDA. Our goal was to choose sites with diverse economic bases. Three of the counties studied were identified as mining counties, two were manufacturing, and two were non-specialized (indicating a variety of economic influences or, in the case of economically distressed counties, a lack of a strong economic influence). Both of the non-specialized counties are located in eastern Kentucky. The Appalachian Regional Commission defines one of these counties as distressed and the other as in transition out of economic distress. Economic distress is defined as falling below national averages in income, educational achievement, and employment. As stated above, an eighth metropolitan site located adjacent to an urban center was also studied. The eight sites were chosen to represent geographic diversity across the state including three western counties (west of Louisville), two central counties, and three counties in eastern Kentucky.

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Pilot Study Results

We conducted a pilot study in one of the sites from September through December of 1998 that indicated that work-related influences were the most significant reason for entering adult education programs. Thus, the comparative study specifically examined how differing economic conditions affect educational decision-making. The study also assessed local community conditions that affect educational decision-making including attitudes about available work and attitudes toward education.

Data Collection

The research was conducted during the period beginning in September of 1998 through August of 1999. In each of the sites, we contacted the local adult education provider(s), social service administrators, and employment services. We also talked with individuals involved with non-profit organizations and churches. These contacts provided us with information about the area and with leads on potential interview participants. Over the course of the research period we spent time in each of the eight sites to conduct interviews, but also to get to know each area. In the interest of time, we focused specifically on the local economic environment. For example, while visiting one site, the researcher spent time at a small town's city hall where local residents pay their utility bills. In another site, a team member visited a local Community Action Agency as volunteers prepared for holiday food basket dispersal. In a third site, the researcher "hung out" at the local unemployment office between appointments. During these visits, we asked questions about the local economy, how people felt about the economic climate in the region, and about local attitudes toward education. What we learned from these conversations informed our interviews, allowing us to probe cursory answers and understand local references.

Selection of Interview Respondents

In seeking interview participants, we were interested in finding individuals who had not completed high school or the GED and were not currently attending an adult education program. Almost 2/3rds of our interview participants had participated in an adult education program at some point, although often for no more than two or three visits. In fact, despite the reported lack of participation in adult education programs across the state, we found it difficult to locate individuals who had never had any experience with adult education services. In selecting interview participants, we also wanted to locate both men and women of diverse ages, occupations, and educational experiences. This purposeful sampling technique resulted in 84 interviews, with approximately 10-17 interviews in each site.

Description of Sample

Table Two contains a breakdown of demographic characteristics of the sample, including descriptions of the number of respondents by geographic region, gender, number of children, home ownership, marital status, and whether or not the respondent receives KTAP.

Table Two: Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Categories	N	%
County	West 1	12	14.3
	West 2	12	14.3
	West 3	17	20.2
	East 1	9	10.7
	East 2	12	14.3
	East 3	13	15.5
	Central	9	10.7
Gender	Female	39	46.4
	Male	44	52.4
Children	0	29	36.3
	1	18	22.5
	2	17	21.3
	3 or more	16	20.8
Home Ownership	Does not own home	41	52.6
	Owns home	37	47.4
Marital Status	Unmarried	33	41.3
	Married	47	58.8
KTAP	No KTAP	56	70
	Receives KTAP	24	30

Table Three describes the employment status of the individuals in our sample. It is important to note that while less than half of our sample were employed full-time when interviewed, most of our respondents considered themselves hard workers either in the workplace or at home and included non-wage earning work in their descriptions of personal priorities and everyday schedules. The sporadic work-history category refers to individuals who have worked a series of low-paying labor or service jobs.

Table Three: Employment

Variable	Categories	N	%
Employment	Unemployed	19	21
	Employed part-time	5	6
	Employed full-time	37	42
	Work multiple wage jobs	11	13
	Work non-wage jobs	19	21
	Sporadic work history	45	51
	Never employed	9	10

Research Questions

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was designed to lead the respondent through a narrative describing what they had accomplished and decisions they had made since leaving school. The following research questions provided the conceptual framework for the in-depth interviews:

- What kinds of internal and external motivations affect the educational decision-making of adults who choose not to pursue adult education or literacy training?
- How do individuals' past experiences with schooling affect their current attitudes toward adult education? How do school leaving experiences influence later perceptions of adult education and literacy programs? What are the implications of both school experiences and later work experiences for conceptualizing alternatives to the GED?
- In areas where unemployment is high, how does the lack of economic opportunity affect educational decision-making? Conversely, where employment is high, how does the availability of work affect participation in adult education programs? How do local economic conditions and attitudes toward education influence the perceived value of adult education programs?

Informal Interviews and Focus Groups

While our primary objective was to collect the impressions of individuals who have chosen not to participate in adult education programming, to do this, we needed to understand the attitudes and perspectives of adult education providers and current students. In addition to the data collected in each site from adult education providers and community leaders, we also conducted an informal phone survey of adult education providers (1999 DAEL grant recipients). Adult education providers responsible for 193 sites across Kentucky were contacted. Through this survey we gathered information regarding the hours and locations of adult education programs,

general demographics of students served, and the average distances students traveled. This data provided background for our interviews and helped us understand how typical adult education programs were in the target sites. We also asked providers to share, based on their experiences, what they believed to be the causes of non-participation. We asked the same questions of current adult education students in focus group interviews conducted in three of the research sites.

Making Sense of the Data: The Process of Analysis

Research using qualitative methods requires ongoing analysis. The results represent what is sometimes called grounded theory because the goal is not to test a hypothesis, but to find new ways of understanding a phenomenon. Some analysis occurs while collecting data, such as decisions on what questions to ask next or who to contact for more information. This is called emergent design. Further analysis takes place as we read and reread the interview transcripts and field notes. In addition to the qualitative analysis, for this project we decided to include a quantitative component using the interview protocol as a survey instrument. The results of this component were analyzed separately (See Appendix C).

The following section introduces the major themes to emerge from the study as told through stories compiled from interview transcripts. These themes include generational differences, gender differences, the influence of local economies on job availability, and challenges to traditional assumptions about undereducated adults. Each of these themes is examined in greater depth and further illustrated by examples from additional respondents later in the report, but these initial stories illustrate many of the issues that affect educational decision-making among study participants.

Everyday Lives: Introductory Stories

Given the importance placed on participants' perspectives throughout this study, much of this report consists of excerpts taken directly from interview transcripts. While the individuals represented in this section are composite characters, their stories reflect the everyday experiences of the individuals we interviewed and, we believe, are representative of many undereducated individuals across the state.

Tom Henson

Tom is twenty years old, married and the father of an infant daughter. He works nearly full-time at a local service station and his wife works in a nearby restaurant. Tom quit school after the ninth grade and reported he "just didn't want to go." Like many study participants, Tom indicated he didn't enjoy school and didn't learn much while he was there.

> *I had some teachers that taught me a lot and some of 'em, they just didn't care if they taught me anything at all. I've learnt more since I've been out of school than I have in school. When I was in grade school, the teachers didn't really care if you learned anything. They's just there to get paid. They didn't try to make kids sit down and do nothing. I got in high school and didn't really care if I did anything or not.*

Tom left school with very low literacy skills and a strong dislike for school environments. Like many male study participants, he has worked in a variety of manual labor positions. With a large number of other workers, Tom was recently laid off when a local factory shut down. Tom is currently employed at a service station.

> *I love my job. I get to read a lot. I fill out little sheets of paper too. I can read a little bit, enough to get me by and that's it. I can read warnin' labels, danger signs, just enough to get me by with. While I'm readin' I have to figure out what it says and how to spell it, stuff like that.*

Tom realizes that his low-level reading skills are detrimental at work. He believes, however, that his reading ability is improving. Tom credits his improved reading skills to both his work experience and also to the help he has received from his wife who recently completed her GED.

> *She knew that I couldn't read, and I can't hardly write [and] I ain't very good in math. But since me and her's been married, she's taught me a whole lot. She's more or less been like a tutor to me.*

I'll set down [at home] sometimes and do a little bit of work. Her and my work, the work stuff I do, has taught me a lot since I ain't been goin' to school.

His ability to improve his reading skills through both work experiences and the tutoring he receives from his wife demonstrate that Tom is capable of raising his literacy skills given a supportive environment and tasks that are relevant for him.

In contrast to traditional assumptions about undereducated adults, Tom clearly values education. Like many participants in this study, however, he especially emphasizes practical skills over purely academic ones. Thus, Tom provides the following definition of an intelligent person:

As long as they could read, write, you know, do math. Somebody who can set down and do stuff that they want to. Like, if you got to figure up bills and stuff, you set down and figure out your bills. Long as they can do that, they're smart.

Tom recognizes, however, that being "smart" or educated does not always translate into gainful employment.

This guy who I'm workin' with right now, he just graduated up there in Lexington. Look at where he's workin' at. And I can't read and I do the same work he does. It don't really matter to me what grade level did you go to. But if you can go to work and work, you're ready to work anytime you want to. You just got to want to.

In spite of his willingness to work hard, Tom believes his limited academic skills have prevented him from advancing at work.

I could have had a management job, you know, like a shift leader job, but I really couldn't count the money and stuff. I wouldn't be able to read enough either, so they wouldn't let me have it. I guess I'll be stuck with makin' $5.50 an hour for awhile. Until I learn to read more and learn more with math.

A number of the respondents and their families are very poor in spite of working extremely hard, often at multiple jobs. For example, Tom frequently does "odd jobs" for extra money. He is of necessity "more worried about the money than I am the school," a concern echoed by several other study participants.

I'm a jack of all trades. I can pour concrete, I can lay block, I can do yard work, or I can take down trees. Odd work. Somethin' I've always been able to do. I guess I've been blessed with it. It keeps me motivated and it keeps me goin'. I just feel better when I m out doin' somethin' like that than I would goin' to school. I d feel a lot

better out doin' somethin' than sittin' at a desk, you know, readin'. I'm an outdoors person.

Thus, Tom identifies manual labor as productive, skilled, and meaningful work through which he is able to supplement his regular but low-paying employment. In sharp contrast to academic environments where he has experienced only failure, physical labor is something at which Tom excels and from which he derives great satisfaction and additional financial resources.

LeAnn Jacobs

LeAnn Jacobs is twenty-six years old. She and her husband have been married ten years and do not have children. Although an excellent student, LeAnn dropped out of school at the age of sixteen while in the tenth grade.

I was married at the time and I said, "Well, I'm married, I don't have to go." So, I got the big head and quit. I liked school for awhile, then when you're a teenager you don't like it no more and my mom had a hard time keepin' me in school. I said, "Well, my mommy don't have to tell me what to do," so I got married and just quit.

In LeAnn's case, neither of her parents finished high school, nor did her sister who also married young and dropped out. LeAnn's mother tried unsuccessfully to keep her daughters in school.

'Cause she wanted different [for us] than what she had. She was growin' up hard and she wanted her kids to have better than what she had. I mean, my Mom's smart. She helped me on my high school work, and she just went to the eighth grade. She helped me on my history and she's good in history.

Even though her mother obviously encouraged LeAnn and helped her with school work, she was unable to prevent both LeAnn and her sister from dropping out of school.

LeAnn stayed home briefly after her marriage but started working at age seventeen and has been employed in the hotel where she currently works since that time.

I used to clean and mop at the lounge and then I was a maid and now I'm in the office. I'm a desk clerk now. That's easier on the body, but when you're dealin' with the public, it's hard. 'Cause some of 'em's hateful and some of 'em's nice. And you have to say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," no matter what.

In addition to her full-time work at the hotel, LeAnn also does lawn work with her

husband in the evenings and on weekends. Rather than being "extra" income, this additional work is necessary for their financial survival and demonstrates the work ethic necessary to individuals living in poverty.

> *I work six days a week. And I don't get home to sometimes 7:00 or 8:00 [o'clock]. I cut grass for extra money on the side. I get more money cuttin' grass than I do here. Sometimes it takes me and my husband about an hour, sometimes it takes us two hours. We double up. Sometimes we do two yards and sometimes we do one. It's accordin' to how much time we have to do it. If we're behind, we double up and do two yards a day.*

Even with both of them working full-time, it is difficult for LeAnn and her husband to survive financially. She related, "When you're makin' minimum wage--$5.15 [an hour]--you have to get a lot [of hours]. Even though I don't have kids, it's still hard to make a living."

While LeAnn values education and indicated she would like to complete her GED, she does not see it as an essential requirement for intelligent behavior and job competence. From her perspective, hard work and a positive attitude are far more important characteristics.

> *I mean, it's good goin' to school and everything, but you really don't have to have a high school education to be smart. You really don't. You have to want to work. You have to have pride in your work. You know, I had pride when I did my rooms when I was a maid. I made sure the beds was clean, put new sheets on it and stuff like that. If you don't have pride then you're not goin' to do a good job. You have to have a attitude in wantin' to do it. If you don't want to do it then you might as well stay home and let somebody else that wants a job do it.*

As her comments clearly indicate, LeAnn has a strong work ethic. LeAnn's positive school experiences and above average high school grades also indicate that she would most likely succeed in a GED program within a reasonable time frame. Her decision not to pursue further schooling, therefore, represents her assessment of formal education relative to her financial needs, allocation of time, and personal goals rather than shame at previous educational failures or a lack of motivation.

Ray Garcia

Ray Garcia is single and lives with his brother and sister-in-law and their children. Ray quit school his senior year because he thought he was "too cool" to go

to school, a decision he regrets.

> *I probably speak for a lot of young men and girls. I just thought it was too cool so I just quit school. But now I do regret it, not getting my diploma. I've always been like the class clown, you know, I've always liked the attention. I think that once I really did try to get my education I was already burnt out. A lot of it had to do with myself. It got to the point where I gave up. Sometimes I did go in, [and] I did really try; but I just got to a point where I goofed up so much that I think they didn't even care to give me my education. And sometimes I think they just passed me just to get rid of me, to be honest.*

Many study participants clearly felt they had been moved through the school system without gaining the skills and knowledge they needed.

After leaving school Ray "bummed around" and worked in a variety of jobs that included carpentry, auto mechanics and manufacturing. His most recent work has been in electronics where he clearly demonstrates aptitude.

> *I worked with electronics and I was doin' real good. I inspected circuit boards and I was supposed to go to college. They was goin' to send me. To get hired in you had to have at least your GED. And see, I was through the temporary service and they really wanted me to come in. There was a fear inside my heart that I didn't want to let them know I didn't have my GED, so I quit. I just felt dumb, I guess, and I didn't want them to know that I didn't have my GED. I think that I'm a pretty smart guy, but it's just that little piece of paper that holds me back.*

Because he lacked the required credential and was self conscious about telling his employer, Ray quit his job. He felt capable of doing the work required of him even though he didn't have "that little piece of paper." Ray had demonstrated his abilities by passing an exam administered by the temporary employment agency that referred him to the electronics job site.

> *I had to have a test, it was 140 questions and two hours and thirty minutes of tests and I passed it. They wouldn't send anybody that didn't pass the test over there. It's just, a lot of times they ask you first thing, [for a] GED or diploma. So I go with the basics, wherever I can get a job, and stick it out as far as I can. But then when they get to the point where they want to hire me, I got to show proof of a GED or diploma and then that's where I break, go somewhere else to another temporary service for awhile because I don't have my*

GED. I just feel bad. I don't want to tell people that I work with.

Ray realizes that not having the GED "holds him back" from job success, but he feels his ability to perform on the job should be more important than the credential represented by the GED.

Given his demonstrated abilities, it seems likely that Ray would be a strong candidate for successfully completing GED classes. He is reluctant to attend, however. Ray started a GED program briefly, but was self conscious and uncomfortable in the classes.

> *I think that some people are afraid to ask questions, you're there and you don't know, and then you're afraid to ask. Some people are very timid and they don't want to feel dumb and they don't come back. Sometimes they feel like they don't fit in and they just don't think they know enough. They just get all stressed out, you know. I just can't ask questions, I just don't want to feel dumb.*

Feeling inadequate in classes was a common concern among respondents. Ray also worried specifically about taking the GED exam and exhibited characteristics of test anxiety.

> *I get scared, you know. I was never a good test taker. I don't know why, I just feel like I'm going to have the wrong answer and it just makes me nervous. Then I feel like, "Man, I guess I am dumb." And probably a lot of people feel like that--"Well, I failed, I had no business takin' it."*

The GED is a real barrier for Ray--not only does it keep him from holding jobs he is capable of performing, it also prevents him from pursuing further education. Ray would like to formally study electronics and stated, "I always want to learn a little bit more, it just fascinates me to learn stuff."

Maria Gonzales

Maria Gonzales is thirty-two years old and a native of Mexico. She and her husband both work full-time in a local factory. They have four school-age children. Maria has lived in Kentucky nearly three years and her husband has been here far longer. Most of Maria's family is still in Mexico. She attended school there as a young child but quit to go to work at age ten when her father died.

> *I liked school, but my Mama don't have money, I can't go to school. I worked. I am cooking and cleaning, for ten years, cooking and cleaning. A little money, no good.*

Maria's husband came to Kentucky and worked fifteen years before bringing Maria

and the children here.

Maria has attended English classes through a local church for approximately six months. Her children are learning to speak English in school and Maria is eager to improve her English skills so she can help them with schoolwork. Also, one of her children was injured last year and Maria was unable to communicate with the doctors.

> *I want to be able to speak English with my daughters and sons. Last year, my son, he had accident. He bled, and he's over there in the hospital and I don't know how to speak English. I don't know for the hospital and for the medicine. He's okay, but I need to speak English to care for him. He's all right now. No more accidents!*

Maria's experience illustrates the importance of English language skills for increasing numbers of Hispanic families across the state.

While Maria's children enjoy school and are doing well, her eighteen-year-old brother-in-law had a very different experience. Romero attended school in Mexico through the ninth grade but then moved to Kentucky. He entered high school here but didn't attend very long.

> *He didn't like it, he didn't want to go back. He couldn't speak good English and didn't talk with nobody, didn't have no friends. Nobody speaks Spanish down there, and he quit.*

While a number of Kentucky elementary and secondary schools provide ESL services, others do not. Language was clearly a barrier that prevented Romero from remaining in school.

Like Maria and her husband, Romero works full-time. Although he is single and without dependents, Romero contributes financially to the household, a common pattern among the Hispanic families in this study. Because of their recent arrival in the state, Hispanic workers are frequently employed in the lowest paying and least desirable workplaces. Although non-English speaking individuals face many issues common to other undereducated adults in the state, they also have special concerns that revolve around language. While the need for ESL classes is their primary one, these adults are also often in need of GED services. Maria indicated she would like to obtain a different job--"Maybe work in a store"--and obtaining the GED might be useful in this process. None of the non-English speaking participants in the study were aware that the GED exam could be taken in Spanish. In fact, few of them understood the meaning of the GED as a credential. Adult education programs seldom provide ESL classes and the need for these services is increasing in many parts of the state.

Darlene Wilson

Darlene Wilson is a 37-year old mother and grandmother. She and her husband maintain a household that includes three generations: her married daughter, son-in-law, and their two children; her unmarried teenage daughter who also has an infant; and her youngest child, a son who is still in elementary school. Darlene is therefore both a mother and grandmother to school age children. Providing for this extended family household is a tremendous financial challenge.

Darlene left school after the ninth grade with very poor skills and struggled with schoolwork from a young age.

> *English, spellin', history and stuff like that, I made C's, D's, and F's. I can't spell that good. I'm not a very good reader at all. I had to have help with readin'. Of course, my grades was bad and so that just tells me I didn't do too good. And my oldest daughter and my son, they're in special ed too. They're the same way, they ain't that good at readin' either, and spellin'. I don't know what it is but it's just a problem that we always had.*

Darlene clearly did not enjoy school and was eager to leave. She married young and had children right away. Her *family responsibilities* added to Darlene's desire to quit school. She related, "I just had kids and got married and never did go back. I didn't really like goin' to school, and havin' my kids, I had to be home with them. I figured that was my place."

Darlene went to work shortly after her first child was born and worked in a variety of minimum wage jobs.

> *The first place I went to work at is at the motel. I worked there three and a half years. And I quit there and came to a pizza place, then cleaning at the electric company. Then I quit and went to the plastic factory, worked there two and a half years. Quit there 'cause my kids started havin' their babies so I figured I better come back closer to home to help with theirs.*

As Darlene's comments indicate, her family obligations are not limited to financial support but also involve extensive time and emotional commitments. Darlene attended GED classes briefly several years earlier when her youngest child was in Head Start but was discouraged by her extremely low skill level and didn't feel she would be able to pass the GED.

> *I just had the feelin' I couldn't do it. I couldn't read good enough. So I figured, "Well, why try when I'm just wastin' my time," knowin' that I*

couldn't do it. I figured maybe I could get a better job if I had my GED. Some people says most jobs anymore that you have to have a GED and I was goin' to try to get me a better job. But then I just figured, "Well, I ain't goin' to be able to do it so why not just keep the job I got 'cause I don't have to have a GED." So I just never did do it, I just quit.

Darlene carefully assessed both the value of the GED and her likelihood of obtaining it given her skill level and made her decision based on these factors. Darlene didn't believe she would be able to pass the GED exam and therefore reasoned that attending classes would be a poor investment of her limited time and energy. Many respondents who could have benefited from literacy tutoring were discouraged from beginning adult education classes because they saw the GED as the ultimate--but unrealistic--goal of adult education programs.

At the time of her interview, Darlene worked 28-40 hours each week for minimum wages. Darlene's family obligations were extensive and she felt attending GED classes would interfere with the time she needed to spend with her children and grandchildren.

I wouldn't be able to spend no time with the family after I get off work and then go to them classes, you know. That's goin' to take up all the time. I don't think I could do both of 'em. It takes me and him both to work to pay our bills. Plus, kids goin' to school, it just takes money. I can't afford to quit a job when I got these bills to pay and no insurance or nothin' else, no medical card or nothin'.

Forced to choose between GED classes and paid work, Darlene--like many study participants--of necessity made work her first priority.

Clara Wilson

Clara Wilson is fifty years old and the single mother of a teenage daughter. She also has a son who has graduated from high school and is currently attending college. Clara dropped out in the ninth grade but at a time when early school leaving was far more commonplace. She married at age fifteen and divorced ten years later.

They tell you to marry, [that] a girl don't have to have an education--I don't tell mine that. I got married. I took care of my home and everything. I done like most women, housework. My first husband, he was workin' in the paper mill in Ohio. We divorced and I came back here, me and my little boy. I was twenty-five. I lived with my family. Well, [then] I got me a little house and child support and that.

Like many single mothers with limited education and few job skills, Clara turned to social services in order to support herself and her child. She received AFDC (now KTAP) for several years when her son was small, but discontinued it when she remarried.

> *When my son got to a certain age I got married [and] I went off welfare. My second husband was a carpenter. We lived pretty good when we was married. When he left, I wasn't gonna get no child support and couldn't get a job and had a little girl, [so] I had to go back. They always told me to get married and have a family, your husband would take care of you. I had two of 'em, they didn't take care of us.*

Women and children often live in poverty as a result of divorce, a reality substantiated by this study. Clara has remained on KTAP since her second divorce and does not receive child support from her former husband.

Clara is currently participating in a welfare-to-work program as part of her KTAP eligibility requirements. She works twenty-five hours each week in a local nonprofit organization. Clara contrasted her present work, which is paid, with an earlier mandated work requirement for which she was not paid.

> *I've made a lot of friends since I've been on this program, different kinds of people. It's been nice. I get paid for this, this is different. The other program, we worked twenty-five hours, just to be workin' so we could get our food stamps and stuff.*

Although Clara enjoys her work, she points out that jobs are scarce in the area and she is not optimistic about finding full-time employment. She relates, "I've tried to go out and get work, I've put my application in every place that's been around here." Like other participants, Clara indicated that "my job would have to come first" and would take priority over adult education classes.

Clara has previously taken the GED exam and failed it twice. She related, "I'm so far behind, I have to catch up. You go from the ninth grade to the books they got now,[and] it's hard." Clara also indicated she would prefer a GED program designed specifically for older adults like herself.

> *It would help if we could get a program in just for adults. You get with a bunch younger than you are and they go on and pass, [and] you feel like a total fool.*

As Clara's story indicates, the longer an adult had been out of school, the more difficult it seemed for them to return.

Donald Porter

Donald Porter is fifty-four years old and his children are grown. He is currently unemployed and suffers serious health problems. A son and daughter-in-law (both of whom work) and their young children are currently living with Don and his wife while their home is under construction. Donald left school after completing the eighth grade to help his family financially. He related, "Back then you didn't have to have much of an education." Donald has worked hard throughout his life in a variety of manual labor jobs. Now that he is older and in poor health, the avenues of employment that he formerly depended on are no longer open to him.

> *I went to work in a lumber yard. I worked there in '69 and then I left and went to Indiana. They gave me a job at the steel mills up there. I came back down here 'cause the economy got so bad. I started hangin' sheet rock with my brother-in-law. Then I went to work for this farm out here. I worked for him until 1990 and I went to work for the mines. In 1994 I got hurt and was laid up for about two years, then I went to work for the chicken plant and worked there for two and a half years.*

His lack of a high school diploma or GED has prevented Donald from obtaining several jobs. He believes his age and poor health were also contributing factors, further illustrating how generational differences affect employment opportunities and education decision-making strategies.

> *I ain't even worked in over a year now. I put my application in quite a few places and nobody wants to talk to me. I went down where my boy's workin' right now. I asked for an application and they asked me did I have my high school diploma or GED? I said "no" and they wouldn't even give me an application. So I went through this temporary service and filled out an application. But they didn't want me and they never called.*

Donald's legs are very painful, making it difficult to stand for extended periods of time.

> *It gets my legs to stand on 'em. And then when I set, my legs and feet go to swellin' and my ankles here go to swellin' real bad and hurtin'. It's just like somebody takin' a hammer and beatin' on me. That happened in '94.*

In spite of these difficulties, Donald considers himself a hard worker and believes on the job training is the best way to learn. He explained that he learns most effectively by actually working alongside the person who is teaching him, a

strategy favored by many study participants.

> *The best thing to prepare 'em for work is to take 'em in there and show 'em what's goin' on and set 'em down and explain every job in there. It might take awhile, but if they's gonna be on certain jobs, set there and explain every detail and spend at least one eight hour shift and show 'em and make sure they do it right. And if they's doin' somethin' wrong, point it out to 'em. A lot of times they just take you in there and show you what's what [and] then walk off. You have to learn the hard way.*

Because he has primarily worked at physically demanding jobs, Donald is especially disadvantaged by his failing health. His identity as a worker is also adversely affected. Donald related, "I've done a lot of things because I was always a worker. You can ask anybody that I worked for and they'll tell you I was a real worker."

As these stories demonstrate, everyday challenges and opportunities provide a complex climate for educational decision-making. Our research analysis indicates that commonly held assumptions regarding adult education influence how these challenges and opportunities are interpreted. The following sections will explore the themes illustrated by the above stories and further demonstrate the multiple perspectives under-educated adults hold toward educational opportunities and credentials. In addition to the major themes of age, gender, and local economic context, we will also discuss the complicating issues of poverty, learning problems, health, ESL, and family concerns. Following this discussion, we will return to these assumptions regarding under-educated adults and further explore how adult education is perceived in these local settings, what programmatic issues this raises, and how these findings might be applied to future policy initiatives.

Emergent Themes: Organizing the Interview Data

As the seven introductory stories indicate, several significant themes emerged from multiple readings of the interview transcripts and structured the data analysis and subsequent understandings of adult education decision-making obtained through this study. These themes transcended both regional and individual differences and served as organizing principles for the analysis phase of the study.

Generational differences

It is clear from the data that respondents' life stages affected their adult education needs and decision-making in important ways. Younger respondents who had left school more recently talked about adult education in very different terms from those respondents who had been away from school environments for longer periods of time. These differences have important implications for adult education programs. This study demonstrates that length of time since school-leaving is an important factor that affects adult education needs and decisions.

Gender differences

As the work of numerous adult education researchers (e.g., Goldstein, 1996; Gowen, 1992; and Winkelmann, 1998) indicates, the life experiences of women and men differ dramatically and these differences affect adult education needs and goals. While undereducated men typically structure their lives around wage-earning opportunities and identities, women--even those who work outside the home--are far more likely to structure theirs around family responsibilities. Men and women often leave school for very different reasons and likewise identify differing motivators and obstacles when they consider returning to school.

Local economic context

In the current employment environment where high school credentials or the GED are required for most work, undereducated adults tend to receive lower wages than high school graduates do and are often blocked from advancement opportunities unless they increase their educational credentials. The desire for better paying employment is an often-cited impetus for further education. Many study respondents were employed at minimum wage jobs and struggled financially, even in families with two or more wage earners. In areas where jobs are scarce, undereducated adults are less likely to see further education as a possible investment. Because conditions of poverty severely stress monetary and time resources, many respondents felt they

had to choose between adult education programs and paid employment and unpaid work needed for daily survival. Of necessity, the choice typically favored work obligations and the often meager income they provided over education programs. Most respondents didn't have the luxury of postponing--even temporarily--paid employment to devote themselves exclusively to educational goals.

These three themes intersect in important ways that further complicate respondents' stories. For example, older men typically voiced different concerns about education and employment than older women. While men worried about health issues related to physical labor and their declining ability to perform in the workplace as they aged, women often were concerned about extended family obligations that potentially included responsibilities for both grandchildren and ailing parents. Economic pressures resulting in changing requirements for work have stranded many senior workers by eliminating their job security, regardless of whether or not they are still able to successfully do the work. Other issues such as learning problems, childcare needs, and health concerns also affected the decisions respondents made about work and education. These additional complexities are explored in later sections of the report. The present section examines how these three primary organizing themes broadly structured the adult education needs and choices of study participants.

Generational Differences

Study participants ranged in age from eighteen to sixty-six with a mean age of 35.95 years. Because respondents related very different schooling experiences and plans given their life stage at the time of the interview, the transcripts were initially grouped into the following age categories:

- near school experience included respondents from 18-24 years of age whose school experiences were fairly recent;
- mid-career included respondents from 25-45 years of age who were typically established in the workplace, although they may have experienced sporadic work histories prior to settling into regular employment;
- and near retirement respondents included those over 45 years of age who were either already retired or indicated they were making plans to leave the work force.

Table Four indicates the distribution of interviews by age category and gender.

Table Four: Interviews by Age Category and Gender

	Male	Female
Near School	10	9
Mid-Career	14	5
Near Retirement	21	26

Near school experience. The near school experience category accounted for 21.8% of the total interviews. Younger respondents provided more school-leaving stories than those in the other age groups, at least partly because these stories were fresh in their minds from relatively recent experiences. Many of these stories focused around specific school confrontations that prompted the respondents to leave school in anger or frustration. A twenty three-year-old black male related the following story:

> *One day, in the gym, I was sittin' there doin' my work. I was just tryin' to finish it before I went home 'cause I didn't like takin' work home. We had PE that day and I didn't do the PE. And we had this coach, he was our PE teacher. I was layin' on the stage and he was yellin' at me and tellin' me to get on the bleachers. And I said, "Wait a minute, let me finish my work and I'll get up there." And he started yellin' at me, cussin' me out, so I just got up and walked to the office. It made me mad, you know, and I got frustrated with them. So I just said, "Fine--I quit!" And I just walked on out of school and didn't come back.*

Similarly, another respondent reported a confrontation with the principal that resulted in her being expelled.

> *I was pregnant and I tried going back and the principal, he made it harder and harder on me 'cause I was in my twenties. He said, "We don't allow older people here," and he'd always harass me. I said, "I'm doing the best I can do and all you're doing is just making it harder on me." He gave me a cussing one day and I said, "I don't have to take this from you." And he kicked me out of school, never allowed to go back.*

While it is not possible to verify the objective truth of these stories, their importance lies in the fact that these former students related them as terminating their high school careers. They made subsequent adult education decisions based on their account of these school-leaving experiences regardless of their objective truth.

Other respondents related stories of administrative errors that caused them to lack the credits they needed for graduation.

> *I was in the eleventh grade. I was passin'--they passed me through to the twelfth. I went to the counselor to get a transcript and I had five credits. From the ninth grade to the twelfth grade and I had five credits. They was gonna let me walk with the rest of them, but I would have had to come back to summer school and then the next semester. I still wouldn't have had all my credits.*

This student reasoned that she would be better off quitting high school and completing her GED rather than spending the time required to make up the credits she lacked.

Oftentimes respondents in the near school experience category viewed the GED as an alternative to high school. They were sometimes encouraged by adults to do so. Older respondents virtually never described the GED in this way.

> *I just got tired of school and signed myself out. My parents was actually kind of the ones that told me to do it, especially my mom. 'Cause at the time I was eighteen and I still had my junior and senior year left. So, she's like, "Go get your GED and you can do whatever, you know, quicker than you can going to school."*

For students in the near school experience category who found school unrewarding and frustrating, the GED presented an alternative way of acquiring necessary workplace credentials. Carrying through with GED completion, however, was not always as easily accomplished as they had anticipated, evidenced by the fact that none of our interviewees had yet completed it. "I've waited about a year now to go get it--two years."

Younger respondents also frequently had less sense of direction than older respondents and often appeared to be at loose ends. They did not have a clear idea of vocational options that might best suit them, as illustrated by the following comments related by a respondent currently employed part-time in a fast food restaurant.

> *I want to get some kind of education and a better job. I haven't really thought about what. The only thing right now is like, factory jobs. I don't really want to do it, but I don't know.*

Rather than moving toward any specific goal, these younger respondents seemed to be moving away from experiences--including school--that they viewed negatively. To some extent this lack of direction is characteristic of late adolescence and young adulthood.

I want to get my GED and get a job. I don't have time to go to college right now and I really need a job and [to] move from where I'm livin'. Then I'll take some college classes. I don't know what kind, but I'll take some just basic classes at first, until I know what I want to major in . . . I want to better myself. I'm like in a stand still right now. I need to go ahead and take my GED and see what else is out there.

Many near school experience respondents were undecided about work, education, and personal responsibilities. This was typically in sharp contrast to mid-career and near-retirement workers.

Mid-career. In contrast to respondents who had recently left school, mid-career respondents primarily focused on career and/or family goals. Many (59.5%) were married, and 63.3% had children at home. Family responsibilities were their major concern and were often cited as barriers to attending adult education classes. Mid-career respondents were of necessity more concerned about time and economic constraints than were younger participants as they struggled to balance family and work demands.

A lot of times I work overtime, especially here lately. We've been real busy and we're getting busier and we're leaving our shop and we're gettin' a bigger shop. . . [And] my wife works late sometimes. I gotta take care of the kids then, you know, and by the time I get them took care of, washing and teeth brushed and them in bed, I'm wore out.

Full-time workers found it difficult to attend adult education classes in addition to their work and family obligations. For many respondents, work requirements were non-negotiable. Their work was essential for meeting financial obligations. Adding adult education programs to their already busy schedule typically meant cutting into family time.

I'd like to get my diploma. Sometimes it's a little hectic to have to work and try and get it, you know, if you have other things planned. It cuts back on some of the things that I would rather be doing.

Mid-career respondents also demonstrated concern about the length of time that they had been out of school and this concern often affected their decisions about attending adult education classes. In most cases, the longer respondents had been out of school, the more difficult they imagined it would

be to return. While respondents in the near school experience category were often confident about their ability to pass the GED exam, mid-career respondents were much more tentative.

> *A lot of things have changed since I went to school, you know. I'm sure it has changed. It seems like it's a whole lot harder to get it now than it would have been then.*

Similarly, another respondent related:

> *I've been out so long, it would make it really hard. It takes a lot out of you after that long. I'm afraid of failing. I've failed all my life. I've heard that it [the GED exam] is really hard, especially the math. I started up there last year, but I didn't get very far. I probably went about a month. But I was workin' all the time and on my feet all day, [and] just tired.*

Thus, for mid-career respondents, work and family obligations in combination often leave little time or energy for adult education programs.

Near retirement: Age is not always a clear-cut measure of where a respondent falls in his/her life stage. For example, some respondents in their late thirties and early forties were already thinking and talking about retirement while others were still firmly established in careers. For older respondents, the assumption that it is normal to finish high school was often a false one; high school graduation was not the norm for many folks who left school twenty-five or more years ago. Significantly, many rural respondents withdrew from school at an early age to help with farm responsibilities.

> *We had to work. I was raised on a farm and we had dairy cows. Some had the opportunity [to finish school] and some didn't. Back in them times, people raised crops and they depended on crops and they kept us home a whole lot, you know, working in crops. That's one reason we didn't get our school finished, 'cause when we come of age, well, then we stayed home and worked. They needed us.*

For respondents of this generation, leaving school early often did not carry stigma or shame, depending on individual and family circumstances. For example, rather than thinking of her seventh grade education as inadequate, the older woman quoted above indicated, "I'm proud I've got as much [education] as I do, it's better than not having any at all."

For near-retirement respondents, the lack of a high school degree did not equate with the lack of skills or ability. Many respondents pointed out that life

experiences provided the best education and that they primarily learned on the job, as the following comments by a Department of Transportation employee indicate.

> *I think it's what you learn while you're workin'. I've learned a lot since I've been here. I had to get my CDL (Commercial Driver's License) and stuff like that and I didn't, never had drove a truck. I had to take a class over here and get my permit.*

Several respondents had obtained the commercial driver's license and pointed out that the CDL required both a written exam and a road test.

Another respondent indicated that he and his wife had learned how to build houses, not through formal training in construction, but simply by doing it.

> *I've built five houses by myself. Me and my wife done it practically all ourselves, you see. I first started out when I was about twelve years old, puttin' down hardwood floors and finishing 'em. So, to see somebody do a little something, you know you can do it to. That's how come me to build my houses myself. I said, "Well, they can do it. Why can't I?" So I just went ahead and built 'em.*

Many older respondents demonstrated confidence in their workplace capabilities. While they were aware that others--often employers--considered their lack of formal education a shortcoming, they seldom thought of it as shameful themselves. Rather, they had demonstrated their ability to succeed in the workplace and took pride in their accomplishments.

Older respondents were increasingly concerned about health issues, especially as these affected their work. Because they were often employed in manual labor positions, advancing age brought concerns about job performance. A former coal miner described his physically strenuous work and related that he often went home exhausted and without energy for other activities.

> *It's just eight hours of hard work. You hardly ever get a break. The only break you'll get is thirty minutes for dinner and that's it. You're back at work. And you can't never catch up because they're advancing all the time. They load so much coal, you just never catch up.*

After mining for more than thirty years, this man was laid off and is partially disabled.

> *I'm really not able to work, I'm busted up. I got black lung bad. I've had both of my ankles broken and busted up and my knee, had my leg broke five times. I've got twenty percent disability out of my leg.*

Like this displaced miner, other near retirement respondents were often concerned about economic issues as they contemplated retirement. Though they

had worked full time since youth, few had received retirement benefits. In many cases respondents needed to remain in the workplace for financial reasons even though their health was deteriorating.

> *I guess I'll stay 'til I'm sixty-five if I'm able, but today may be my last day. I don't know. A man havin' bypass [surgery] don't know one day to the next, really.*

Many respondents lacked the financial resources that would allow them to retire before age sixty-five when they would be able to collect Medicare benefits. These workers stayed on the job for medical insurance.

> *I don't make enough money, more or less, I'm just workin' for insurance, I guess. 'Cause seven dollars an hour this day and time, you don't make nothin'. If my wife wasn't workin' I couldn't make a livin' no way. There just ain't no way a man could make it.*

Some older respondents were also concerned about "looking foolish" and not knowing enough to take classes, a problem they often related to the length of time they had been out of school.

> *I'd rather work as to go through the book work. 'Cause I'm gettin' too old for it to help me, really. I wouldn't want 'em to think I was dumb as a coal bucket. That's the way I feel about it. Even if I was in the workforce, I wouldn't have long to get out.*

Other respondents worried about being able to do the schoolwork required of them. They were concerned that their skill level, in combination with the extended time period since they had attended school, would prevent them from succeeding.

> *If I knew I could do it, it wouldn't bother me. But, I don't know, I'm just slow at it. If I knowed I could read it and understand it, it wouldn't bother me a bit. If I can understand it I can get along with the best of them, but if I can't understand it, then I can't do it.*

While older respondents seemed very aware of the trend toward credentialing, they were often unaware of how to negotiate it successfully and frequently thought of it as an imposition. Even though they indicated education was important for younger workers--their children and grandchildren--many older workers felt it was inappropriate to demand of themselves. Workers who were hired without a GED to do such things as run heavy equipment, work on production lines, and clean schools, were now being pressured to complete their degree for job advancement. These workers were especially critical of the GED as a credential.

> *The only job I've had is when I got on here. Seems like it was. I'll be honest with you, seems like it was easier to come to work for the*

state than when I would try to get other jobs. It seems like it wasn't that big of a deal here. . . I have been going on fourteen years now. I was hired, you know, without a high school education and they didn't bring all this up then. You still work your same job.

Similarly, another respondent related:

I'm a special equipment operator. And when I come here I started at the bottom and climbed my way up. I mean, I think if a man can do his job and do it right, they ort to give him the money. Whether they have a high school education, or four years of college, or eight years of college.

These older workers felt the requirement that they complete the GED was an inappropriate one that penalized them even though they demonstrated daily that they were able to do the work they had been hired to do.

Educational needs and goals are assessed differently at varying points in respondents' lives. Younger respondents who had left school more recently were often more prepared and confident about returning to a class setting that might be similar to what they had recently left. These respondents also needed vocational and career counseling to help them make informed decisions about the workplace and, possibly, additional education. For respondents in the mid-career category, work and family obligations were paramount. These respondents were especially concerned about simultaneously managing adult education classes in addition to their extensive home and work responsibilities. Specific programmatic issues such as class availability and scheduling were especially critical for this group of respondents given the demands on their time and energy. Finally, respondents in the near retirement category were especially concerned about economic issues surrounding retirement. The length of time since they had left school was also a critical issue for these respondents--many expressed concern that they would be unable to complete the GED. Like many of the mid-career respondents, these older workers often resented the recent imposition of a requirement of a credential that many believed was inappropriate for the work they valued and had performed well for most of their lives. For this group of respondents in particular, an alternative credential to the GED might be a more appropriate and obtainable goal.

Gender Differences

Male and female respondents regarded adult education needs and goals very

differently. Males were primarily concerned with wage-earning labor and family support while females placed a greater emphasis on in-home family responsibilities that typically included childcare and housekeeping. Statistical analyses indicated that males (62.2%) were somewhat more likely than females (37.8%) to report being motivated to attend adult education programs for job-related purposes. Conversely, females (73.3%) were more likely than males (26.7%) to report that they were motivated to attend programs for family-related reasons. Deterrents to adult education attendance were also gender-related. Job-related time constraints were more typical for males (77.8%) than for females (22.2%), whereas child-related constraints were more typical for females (90%) than for males (10%). Thus, gender clearly plays an important role in adult education needs and decisions.

Male respondents were typically employed in manual labor positions in which they took great pride. Many men described themselves as "self taught" and hard workers.

> *I've always been the type of person who can learn anything. You know, as far as educatin' myself and learnin' anything, I haven't run across too much I can't do. I'm self-taught, everything I've learned I've learned on my own.*

For these men, the lack of a formal education did not typically represent a lack of job skills. Male respondents worked in a variety of manual labor positions that included construction, mining, farming, mechanics, factory work, sawmill work and transportation. For many of the men who participated in this study, physical labor provided a strong sense of identity and competence. Although many struggled financially, these men typically prided themselves on their abilities as workers and providers.

Many of the female respondents also worked outside the home and in 63% of the two-parent households both adults worked. Women respondents tended to have erratic work histories in low skill and low status jobs that were particularly vulnerable to economic upheaval. Women's work, both inside and outside the home, often revolved around cooking, cleaning and childcare. Many of the women reported working in fast food restaurants, in hotels and motels as cleaning staff, in nursing homes, and in childcare facilities. Less frequently, women were employed in factories and retail positions.

> *Restaurant jobs and motel jobs are things that sure can make you wish that you had stayed in school! I hated it. Eight years I worked in a motel before I got this job workin' at the day care. Just a little tired of it--clean, clean, clean . . . I'm cleanin' again, but it's supposed*

to change this fall--supposed to get to become a teacher. I'm sure hopin' so. There's nothin' can make somebody [want to] change a whole life situation as to have to clean every day at work and at home.

Women's work, although often low-paying, was frequently necessary for economic survival.

While men often left school prior to graduation to enter the workforce, women frequently left at a young age because of pregnancy or marriage. Twenty-four percent of the female respondents reported pregnancy was the primary reason they left school prior to graduation.

I was pregnant with my daughter and I kept passing out because I was anemic. My Mom got scared that my passing out would hurt the baby, so I quit school. I was sixteen and I just signed myself out.

I got pregnant. The doctor wanted me out [of school] 'cause I wasn't even fifteen when I got pregnant, and he wanted me to do school at home. When I turned fifteen I quit. I was just sick of it.

The birth of an infant often meant the end of school for these young women who found it difficult to simultaneously continue their education and care for a newborn. In addition, many of the women reported they felt it was "their place" to stay at home after the birth of a child.

Divorce was also a common occurrence among study participants. Women whose marriages ended were especially vulnerable to economic hardships.

I got married at the age of fifteen, had my first child at the age of seventeen. I was a stay home mom because he made good money. He was in the coal mine. My twin sons were born when I was 21 and then we divorced and I went to work cleanin' houses.

That women and children often experience a dramatic change in economic status following divorce has been well documented. The single mothers in this study frequently resorted to social services for financial help. Even so, many continued to struggle economically and remained in poverty.

The welfare plan, it's fine, but there is not enough there to take care of your kids. Even if they give you the money for a baby-sitter, that's that baby-sitter's money. That don't help you get back and forth. That don't help you to make sure your kids get a decent meal and stuff. Welfare never paid me enough to stay home and take care of my kids full-time. Because I had a house payment, car payment,

and four kids, so I will work anywhere, any time I can.

Numerous individuals received some kind of governmental aid. Social service support was not limited to single parent families, however. Two-parent families also received varying types of assistance that included KTAP, food stamps, disability, Medicaid, and social security insurance (SSI).

Female respondents often reported that childcare and household responsibilities made it difficult for them to attend adult education programs. Many women depended on other family members to help with childcare and if these resources fell through they were often without alternatives. One respondent related, "It's tough to get a baby-sitter, especially with four kids." Other women, including those who worked outside the home, reported they had dropped out of adult education programs that interfered with family responsibilities.

> *I was cleanin' 'til about 5:00pm and they started their program at 6:00pm. Well, my kids needed to be fed and taken care of and I had no one to do it but my older son. The children needed me and to me, that was more important at the time.*

Women were more concerned than men about the impact of education on their children. Women's impetus for entering adult education programs frequently involved the desire to help children with homework and to model educational achievement for them.

> *When I read my oldest a story and I did not know the words, I would just make up words. And when they got into school, time they got into kindergarten, I realized that wasn't going to work. So I started makin' myself learn. When my oldest one brought homework home, we would sit down and figure it out. If I did not know the word, he knew it.*

Women frequently emphasized the value of education for their children, many worked hard to see that their children finished school, and expressed great pride in children's educational success.

> *My son's in college now. He's in computers. My grouchin' has paid off. I pushed him to go to school. He does pretty good for hisself. I don't know how.*

Conversely, another woman whose children dropped out of school reported:

> *If I had've got mine, my kids might would have gone on and got theirs. They look at me and say, "Well, Mom quit, I'll quit." So I feel like I let them down.*

As these comments indicate, many respondents found it difficult to keep their

children in school even though they strongly desired to do so.

Clearly gender plays an important role in adult education decision-making. The undereducated males who participated in this study were most likely to attend adult education programs for job-related reasons. Their work schedules, however, often left little time or energy for adult education programs. For women, family issues were paramount. Childcare and household responsibilities impinged on the time they had for adult education classes. Family literacy programs have typically been directed toward females and many study participants had formerly participated in PACE (Parent and Child Education) programs. While it is important for AEL programs to recognize women's interest in improving educational outcomes for their children, it is also necessary to take into account the constraints that exist for women who often work outside the home in addition to their family responsibilities.

Local Economic Context

Study participants made adult education decisions based on a rational assessment of the relative value of further education given their local economic context. In areas where few jobs were available, the incentive to attend adult education classes was diminished. One respondent argued:

> *There's never no work around here. What are you goin' to do if you had your GED? Where are you going to work? Flip hamburgers?*

Local economic conditions and the availability of jobs clearly affected respondents' assessment of the value of further education. Most of our interview respondents were grounded in local networks of support and not interested in moving to find work. When jobs were not available, it was very difficult for undereducated adults to see the value of further education. Conversely, when low skill work was available, expectations of being able to find work without further education were confirmed. Recent changes in low skill labor markets may not have changed these beliefs.

Respondents sometimes related the need to make choices between education and work. Typically, they found work their most compelling obligation.

> *You have to work to make a living 'cause you got to have that money comin' in for income. And I know you don't get paid gettin' your GED.*

Another respondent reported

> *I can't go during the day because of my workin' hours and I need the money more than I need the education at this point. I know that*

sounds dumb, but that's the way it is.

Paid labor was virtually always and of necessity more immediately valuable for respondents than further education.

Study participants valued practical job-related skills over purely academic ones. When asked what makes a person intelligent, they frequently responded that "common sense" was the most important criterion. Respondents contrasted common sense with "book learning" and most placed higher value on practical knowledge and job performance.

> *You can't sit and read the book and go out and weld. You have to do it, you know. You have to learn it. . . I can sit and read a book about anything and fifteen minutes later I couldn't tell you what it was about. I just never was a big reader and never did like to read. Now if I was doing it, I would learn it and pick it up. But if I was reading, I wouldn't comprehend.*

Most respondents valued practical experience and the ability to successfully carry through on the job over formal education. Respondents indicated that, given the kinds of work they typically performed, "book sense" was far less valuable than "common sense."

> *There's a difference between [someone] that can drive a truck and a person that can operate it. An operator takes care of his equipment, he knows exactly what to do with it and he is good. Just like a front end loader--any bacon can run anythang, but to be considered an operator is different. Now there's people that I would turn loose on something, you know, if they got basic common sense. There's people that know their way. I can give you examples of people with an education but no common sense whatsoever. You don't want 'em to handle a skill saw.*

Many study respondents viewed the GED as a barrier that prevented them from obtaining work they had already demonstrated they were capable of performing. They recognized that the GED is often required for entry into the workplace, but resented this requirement when they felt capable of performing the work required. Many respondents referred to the GED as "a piece of paper" that kept them from jobs they were able to perform.

> *I don't think they ought to judge a lot of people about what's on a piece of paper. I mean, I've never been a certified mechanic but I done it for ten years. I've never been a certified welder, but I do it now and I do it just as good as anybody that's certified. Just*

because there's a piece of paper there doesn't mean that you know how to do it. I've run into people that have all these papers and degrees and they don't really know because all they've done is sat and read books and took tests. There's a lot of emphasis on the job force--"Well, you need a GED, you have to be certified." I feel like a lot of people, just because you don't have a piece of paper saying you know how to do something, then [they think] you don't know how to do anything.

Most study participants were aware of the connection between education and employment. They realized that the GED or high school diploma is increasingly required for even entry-level positions. Many respondents, however, resented this requirement and felt it was an inappropriate one given the kinds of hands-on work they frequently performed. Further, the local economic context played a large role in their assessment of the value of further education--when jobs were not readily available, it was exceedingly difficult for respondents to see the value of further education.

Complicating Issues

In addition to the major organizing themes discussed earlier, other issues that affected their lives in complex ways further complicated the adult education decisions of study respondents. This research demonstrates that it is important for policy makers and program providers to realize that adult education clients are holistic individuals with a variety of responsibilities and concerns. Adult education decision-making is a complex process that accounts for both individual and societal influences. The following issues were among those that complicated adult education decision-making for respondents:

- Poverty and financial difficulties;
- Learning problems that affect educational aspirations and efforts;
- Health issues that impinge on both employment and education decisions;
- ESL issues that affect education and employment opportunities; and
- Family concerns that require significant time and energy commitments.

While not all respondents faced each of these issues, many were affected by multiple factors and thus found adult education program participation especially challenging.

In order to meet the needs of adult education clients effectively, it is important that program providers acknowledge these complicating issues and actively assist

clients in discovering ways to overcome them.

Poverty and financial difficulties add stress

Many undereducated adults in Kentucky struggle financially and suffer the adverse effects of poverty and financial stress. Several study participants related stories of economic hardship that affected their lives in a variety of ways. Many respondents survived on very limited financial resources and were constantly fearful of emergencies such as injuries or illness, major automobile expenses, or job loss that might precipitate economic ruin. Several respondents were especially concerned about the effects of poverty on their children.

> *What makes me feel bad is that I don't have the money to, you know, do for my son and to get him everything he wishes and dreams. I wished I could. Maybe one of these years.*

Often financial difficulties made further education both more essential and simultaneously more difficult to obtain. Undereducated adults who struggle economically clearly realize that education credentials might provide access to better-paying jobs. At the same time, however, many have financial and family obligations that leave little time or energy for participation in adult education classes. This Catch-22 situation frequently results in a feeling of being trapped in circumstances over which they have little control. Few study participants were in a position where they could afford time off from work to concentrate on further education. Of those who were employed, most emphasized that their work was of necessity more immediately important than adult education opportunities.

Learning problems affect educational aspirations and efforts

For many study participants, learning problems that emerged during elementary and secondary school continued to affect later educational experiences. A number of respondents reported they had struggled with school work from an early age and were frequently frustrated.

> *A lot of people's slow on everything. I'm a slow learner and I get real frustrated. I want to just say "forget it" and get up and walk out and that makes it harder.*

Those respondents who reported themselves as slow learners were often unhappy in school and reluctant to return to educational settings as adults.

Other respondents indicated that their learning difficulties had been formally diagnosed by the school system.

> *I was dyslexic. They didn't catch it the first year I was in school so I*

had to repeat the first grade and they kind of figured the second year there was something wrong. I was having a lot of problems so they put me in these classes which helped some, but I didn't learn like other kids. They didn't really know how to teach me. It's not that I couldn't learn, it's just that they needed to figure out another way of how to teach me.

While his learning difficulties were recognized and addressed, placing this student in special classes was also a humiliating experience that ultimately resulted in his disengaging from school.

When you put a kid in the classes that they put me in, kids are cruel, you know, they make fun of you. Of course, that makes you bull-headed and you want to fight–been there and done that. And you get an attitude and you don't want to learn. That's basically what happened to me.

Learning difficulties, whether or not they were diagnosed by the school system, often resulted in a sense of failure and a strong dislike for school-like environments and thereby adversely affected subsequent educational experiences.

Health issues impinge on both employment and education decisions

Health issues affected the adult education and work decisions of several study participants. One participant who had lost his job following a serious leg injury related:

My doctor wants me to get a job where I can sit down. They don't have any work where I was that I can do. I just need to get some kind of job. I was doin' good until this happened. I had me a good job.

Because his injury was not work-related, this man received no compensation for his job loss. And because his leg injury keeps him from doing the kind of physical work in which he was experienced, he feels unprepared to find other employment. He is further disadvantaged in his job search by his lack of education.

Health issues also occasionally affected the ability of study participants to attend adult education classes. One woman reported that she could not sit for long periods of time because of a back injury and another woman had withdrawn from adult education classes after numerous surgeries. Several respondents mentioned heart-related health problems that made them cautious about taking on additional responsibilities.

The health of dependent family members also made it difficult for some

individuals to attend adult education classes. This was especially the case for mothers (or grandmothers) who were responsible for the care of young children. One woman pointed out that it was particularly difficult to find childcare for her young son who suffered from severe asthma that required special treatment. She reported, "Some daycare centers won't take him." While adult education programs cannot be expected to meet the health needs of all clients, it is important to recognize that health issues frequently impinge on adult education clients' lives and further complicate their decision-making.

ESL issues affect education and employment opportunities

Although the total number of participants in this study who speak English as a second language is small (5 of 84), the ESL population is a growing one in many parts of the state, which raises unique issues for adult education providers. Language clearly affects both employment and educational opportunities and aspirations. All the non-English speaking respondents in this study were Hispanic. Census data indicates that this is the largest and fastest growing minority in the state. While many public schools and adult education programs are responding to the needs of non-English speaking clients, in some areas the response has been less than adequate. For example, few of the adult education providers contacted across the state indicated that they routinely provide ESL services. In many cases, ESL programs are provided through local churches (this is how the ESL participants in the present study were recruited) and, occasionally, through employers who hire significant numbers of non-English speaking employees. Often, local adult education programs do not have staff members who are trained to teach ESL classes and lack the funding necessary to hire or train additional teachers.

This study indicates the need for adding ESL services and information about these services to extant adult education programs. For example, none of the non-English speaking participants in this study were aware that it was possible for them to take the GED exam in Spanish. In fact, most were unaware of the adult education programs available in their community. They had learned about the English classes they attended at the local church by word of mouth and through church outreach programs. The limited information this study provided about ESL clients indicates that this is an area that requires further attention. The needs of ESL clients go beyond language issues and include cultural factors as well. While ESL clients demonstrate many of the same needs as other adult learners, they face additional language-related and cultural adjustment issues that further complicate their educational decision-making.

Family obligations require significant time and energy commitments

Many study respondents reported complex family obligations that required significant time and energy commitments. These obligations frequently interfered with their ability to attend adult education programs. Certainly childcare was an often-mentioned responsibility, especially for women.

> *Mainly my children always are in need of me. Seems like every second, every minute. Or just doing things that are required of me at home, you know, takin' care of the children. Lots of times I don't have a baby-sitter after I get off work 'cause the day care closes at six, so it's kind of difficult.*

While females most frequently discussed child-related responsibilities, several male respondents also indicated they were at times responsible for childcare.

> *If I ain't workin', I'm watchin' the kids. Most of the time, I'll load them up and we'll go to the park or we'll go fishin'. Do somethin' or other, somethin' for them to have fun, and me to have a little enjoyment, too.*

In addition to childcare responsibilities, many respondents were responsible for home maintenance tasks that included mowing and trimming the lawn, vehicle maintenance, and, occasionally, farm chores. All of these obligations require time and energy and may make it difficult for adults to commit to education programs.

Policy Issues: Assumptions and Misconceptions about Adult Education and Undereducated Adults

As discussed earlier, many respondents held expectations about adult education programs that were often inaccurate and inappropriate. These assumptions were based both on personal experiences and the reported experiences of friends and family members. Those respondents who had previous contact with adult education programs often critiqued their experiences in a variety of ways and provided suggestions for how services might better meet their needs as consumers. Even if individuals had no prior experience with adult education, the reported experiences of their friends and family members colored their perceptions. Although the present study was not intended as an evaluation of adult education programs, these prior experiences and respondents' interpretations of them provide important information about adult education services from a client-centered perspective. The following inaccurate assumptions about adult education programs were among those held by respondents.

"Adult education classes will be like earlier school experiences."

Many study respondents assumed that adult education classes would be similar to their earlier school experiences in significant ways. Some respondents thought that adult education literally meant returning to school. For example, one study participant reported, "I didn't know if I was going to have to go back to the Middle School, start all over, or what." Other respondents assumed that literacy and GED classes would involve the same kinds of activities they had experienced in earlier school settings. Since many had been unsuccessful in elementary and secondary school, imagining that adult education experiences were "like school" was likely to discourage these individuals from participating in adult education programs.

Other respondents specifically disliked the thought of sitting in class. They preferred active learning and associated adult education classes--like their earlier school experiences--with being indoors and doing didactic seatwork. For many respondents, the thought of sitting in class and doing "book work" was a strong deterrent for adult education participation.

> *Physical stuff, you know, I get really interested in, I like more of a challenge. I like doing stuff like that. Now, just sittin' down readin' and sittin' there holdin' a book, now I just never was interested in it. I ain't much on sittin' at home and studyin'. If I'm at home, I want to be out in the garage or out doin' somethin'. I ain't gonna' pick up a*

book and read when I'm at home.

Notice this speaker refers to reading as studying, implying that he sees adult education as an environment in which the student is tested. These comments suggest that it is important for adult education providers to realize that many adult students are unlikely to succeed in an environment that looks and feels like school.

"If you did poorly in school, you will do poorly in adult education classes."

Study participants often assumed that lack of success in elementary and secondary school would translate to a lack of success in adult education and literacy classes. Their tendency to equate adult education with "school" and all of its negative connotations made many respondents reluctant to enter adult education settings and fearful of failure when they did so. Similar to the assumption that successful completion of the GED required a certain beginning level of knowledge, the assumption that previous school failure would result in failure in an adult education program discouraged many potential students from entering classes. Because they had failed or done poorly in earlier school experiences, respondents often assumed they didn't "know enough" to participate in adult education classes. Many respondents reported they would not enroll in programs because they did not feel like they had the necessary background knowledge. Other former students reported they had dropped out of classes because they expected to fail.

I had started GED classes in '96 and quit. I was going to go try for the test, and everyone else that went failed math. So I just felt like, "Well, there ain't no sense in me going."

Similarly, another respondent reported, "There ain't no use in even tryin' 'cause you can't comprehend it." Public "talk" about adult education often confirms individuals' negative perceptions. If they feel they lack sufficient skills, many students expect to fail and are understandably reluctant to begin classes.

"The GED is the ultimate goal of adult education classes."

Like many adult education providers, study participants frequently defined adult education and literacy classes as "GED" classes, assuming that the GED exam was the focus of adult education programs. This study indicates that, for many respondents, the GED was an unrealistic goal due to the length of time that had passed since they left school or because of learning issues. For other participants, the GED was of questionable value given their employment opportunities. Focusing exclusively or even predominantly on the GED exam was frequently a deterrent for both potential adult education students who imagined themselves unable to reach

this goal successfully and for those who believed few jobs were available, even for those who successfully completed the GED.

> *I know a lot of people who have got their GED and ain't got a job. I mean, they've been tryin' to find a job for years. I'm not sayin' that when you do get your GED that you won't get a job, 'cause you might be the lucky one to get one.*

Rather than viewing the GED as the ultimate goal of adult education programs, this study suggests that both providers and potential students would be wise to consider other options that might better meet the needs of undereducated adults. Many respondents observed that the GED has limited value given the work they are typically engaged in. While these respondents were likely to criticize the GED requirement as inappropriate, they were often willing to participate in job training that they saw as useful and valuable in the workplace.

"The GED exam is easy (or hard), but without a sense of what it entails."

Of the respondents who participated in this study, two-thirds knew someone who had previously taken the GED exam. Many respondents either had family members or friends who had attended GED classes. Thus, respondents had gathered a great deal of information from the experiences of others, although much of this information was inaccurate and misleading. For example, some respondents expected the GED to be harder than finishing high school while others expected it to be easier. In either case, their information was likely to provide them with inaccurate expectations about adult education classes.

> *I've heard that people talks about the GED as harder than like regular, tryin' to get your diploma. That's what I've heard.*

While information gathered from the experiences of others can sometimes be useful by relieving discomfort and making participants more familiar with the adult education process, it can also be damaging when it leads potential students to expect success or failure inappropriately. This study suggests the need for clear information about adult education programs that is specifically directed toward dispelling inaccurate expectations undereducated adults may hold.

Assumptions about Under-Educated Adults

Just as students have misconceptions about adult education, adult education educators and policy makers may have misconceptions about individuals who

choose not to participate in formal adult education. This study demonstrates that, in many ways, the experiences of respondents challenge assumptions commonly held about undereducated adults. Unless educators and policy makers become more familiar with the complex reasons that individuals decide not to participate in adult education programs, they may continue to believe the following assumptions about undereducated adults that are frequently embedded in programs and policies directed toward them:

- They do not value education.
- They do not recognize that "education pays" in important ways.
- They do not recognize the need for educational credentials.
- They do not participate in adult education programs because of shame or fear.
- They do not participate in adult education programs because they are lazy or unmotivated.
- The GED is the most appropriate goal for all undereducated adults.

Again, some of these statements may be true of some individuals some of the time and education providers and social service counselors are often in the best position to observe consistent behaviors over time. In fact, it is the everyday validation of our assumptions that makes us cling to our beliefs. Every time a student does not show up for a tutoring session or when a trial program of offering classes at a new time or location fails, commonly held assumptions about under-educated adults are re-confirmed. However, the reasons individuals chose not to attend adult education programming are complex and certainly do not reflect a lack of appreciation for the opportunities education may offer.

"They do not value education."

While it may appear reasonable on the surface to assume that undereducated adults do not value education, this assumption is strongly contradicted by the data collected through this study. Time and again study participants stated that they do in fact value education highly. Most regret not finishing school. 65% of our respondents stated that they liked to read, indicating that they may continue to learn albeit through non-formal means. Virtually all who are parents vow to do everything within their power to help their children finish high school. In most cases, their work experiences and economic situations have made it amply clear to them that education is important and frequently necessary for access to well paying jobs and workplace advancement. Having struggled to find jobs that allow them to support

their families, most study participants clearly value education, both for themselves and for their children.

> *It's held me back. I mean, I could have got a better job if I had of finished high school and had a diploma. If you don't have a high school diploma or GED they won't hire you, there's a whole bunch of factories that just won't do it . . . I want my kids to finish school, number one. And they will if I have anything to do with it. That's what I want for them.*

While most respondents placed a high value on education, they also frequently emphasized its practical application over purely academic skills. For many study participants, much of the value of education was found in its practical usefulness.

> *You got to know something about everything, no matter what job you're on. You got to know math in everything. You got to know how to spell 'cause if you don't write that down right, how they going to know what you're saying? Especially if you're writin' down what you need. If you don't know how to tell 'em then they don't know. You got to know how to read and write and all that.*

In conjunction with their emphasis on practical skills, many respondents indicated they learned best through hands-on experiences. Therefore, many believed on-the-job training--rather than "book learning"-- was the most appropriate preparation for the kinds of work they were typically engaged in.

> *Construction, you don't have to go through no tests. You learn how to do it and you do it. That's what I like about that. They teach you right there. And sure, you'll mess up once or twice, but they will show you again and you will get it right.*

Thus, while study participants clearly value education, they value its practical aspects over purely academic knowledge. Since many study participants indicated that job-related concerns were their primary motivation for pursuing further education, they wanted to see clearly how further educational experiences would lead to meaningful and well paid work opportunities. Training that does not have practical workplace application is therefore far less valued by study respondents.

"They do not recognize that 'education pays' in important ways."

This assumption is a corollary of the previous one. It implies that undereducated adults do not recognize the value of education for workplace access and job success and, like the assumption that they do not value education, this second assumption is also challenged by the present study.

While many respondents were well aware of the rhetoric about the value of education, they frequently observed that in many situations education doesn't pay adequately enough to make it worth their effort. This is especially true in areas where unemployment is high, as discussed earlier. One respondent reported, "Most of them that I know that's graduated, that's took the GED classes and everything, they said that, really, as far as job-wise, it's not helped. They still haven't got a job." Respondents' comments indicate that many have carefully assessed the relative value of further education given the work they perform and the jobs typically available in their community and concluded that, often, education does not pay sufficiently to justify its cost in time and effort.

For example, Kentucky Department of Transportation workers who were hired without the GED are now required to obtain it in order to receive salary increases. If they successfully pass the GED exam, workers receive a bonus and are also eligible for additional pay increases. The following comments illustrate how one DOT worker carefully assessed the relative value of the GED in light of these opportunities.

> *I think they've offered me a bonus. But I figure if it's ten percent of what you make, you get say, fifteen hundred dollars, what I make, fourteen, somethin' or the other. Then the government will get half of it, so you ain't goin' to get but six or seven hundred dollars and that's just a one time thing. It ain't all that important. I mean, I need the money, don't get me wrong. It just ain't that important to get up there and make a fool of yourself. To me--it may be to somebody else.*

While this worker is obviously aware that "education pays" in the context of his workplace, it does not pay sufficiently to make it worth the effort he feels it would require.

"They do not recognize the need for educational credentials."

Most study participants realize the need for educational credentials in the workplace. They frequently lament their own lack of appropriate credentials--the high school diploma or GED--and extensively illustrate the repercussions they have suffered in the workplace. The knowledge that credentials are often required, however, does not automatically translate into agreement that these are appropriate requirements. Many study participants argued that, given the work they perform, the

GED is not a necessary credential. Most study participants valued job performance over the GED or high school diploma and felt the demonstrated ability to perform in the workplace was a more important qualification than a credential they often referred to as a "piece of paper." Thus, while most respondents realized that a diploma or GED is increasingly required in the workplace, few; however, believed this requirement was in fact appropriate.

> *For hard labor jobs, you wouldn't have to have that much education even though nowadays they're requiring at least a high school education or a GED before you can get any kind of work. I have went lookin' for jobs in places like dry cleaners, laundrymats, restaurants are requiring it.*

Many study participants viewed the GED as a barrier that prevented them from getting jobs they were capable of performing. Respondents often questioned the need for "book learning" for the kind of work they were frequently engaged in. A former coal miner indicated, "If you could run a piece of equipment it didn't matter to them if you could write your name--long as you had coal on the belt and took care of their equipment, they didn't care". The discrepancy between the skills required to obtain the GED and those required by the workplace made many respondents critical of the GED or diploma as reasonable credentials.

Significantly, a number of individuals did recognize the value of education as a means of achieving para-professional jobs in business and medicine. These references to post-secondary education, however, like the descriptions of the jobs for which they would be eligible, were vague and unsubstantiated with knowledgeable detail. Even for students who are likely to succeed in completing the GED, it seems unlikely that they would be able to reach professional careers without significant support and educational counseling.

"They do not participate in adult education programs because of shame or fear."

In responding to our informal phone survey of adult education centers throughout the state, providers responded that shame and fear were among the primary reasons undereducated adults do not participate in available adult education classes. Study respondents, however, seldom identified shame or fear when discussing adult education participation. While study participants often speculated that other people thought of their lack of education as a personal failure of which they might be ashamed, respondents rarely described themselves as feeling ashamed. In fact, many respondents stated just the opposite.

I ain't embarrassed about it myself. I'm more or less likely to know people that don't care. Everybody pretty much don't say nothin' about it because they don't want to hurt my feelings or nothin', I guess. Or make me mad at 'em. It don't bother me.

Self-consciousness and embarrassment about lack of education was typically a concern respondents felt was imposed on them by other people, not one that necessarily reflected their own feelings. Another respondent reported, "A lot of people, whenever you misspell something, they act like it's a sin or something." It was others' reaction to his spelling, however, that troubled this respondent, not his inability to spell.

Older respondents did sometimes mention embarrassment and self-consciousness in conjunction with adult education classes. Often, however, these comments reflected their concern about the length of time they had been out of school rather than an inherent shame of their lack of education.

"The GED is the most appropriate goal for all undereducated adults"

This study suggests that the assumption that the GED is the most appropriate goal for all undereducated adults is a faulty one. Many study participants firmly believed that they would not be able to successfully obtain the GED and, while this study did not in any way measure participant ability levels, in many cases their assessments appeared to be justified. For respondents with limited literacy skills the GED is often an inappropriate and unrealistic goal. Many study respondents were frustrated and discouraged because they viewed the GED as beyond their reach.

Literacy programs are often more appropriate for clients with very low reading levels. For many of these folks the GED is not an obtainable goal.

She give me a skill test with some words to see what all I know and I was almost at the bottom. I think about the third grade level. 'Cuz when I was goin' to school I just couldn't comprehend the written letters and the words and the sounds. I know that when I finished grade school they just passed me to get rid of me. I made nothin' but straight F's. When I had to get up in front of the class to try to read, I couldn't read. I just couldn't do it. I guess I ain't got the learning, I ain't got it up here.

For students like this one with very low literacy skills, the assumption that the GED is the appropriate goal is clearly faulty. While the student quoted here has benefited from literacy tutoring, he is unlikely to complete the GED. To expect him to do so is

unrealistic and simply sets him up for further failure.

Effectively meeting the needs of undereducated adults in the state requires a willingness to acknowledge the complexity of their lives and to recognize the requirement for flexibility and creativity in addressing educational needs. Rather than defining undereducated adults exclusively as "lacking" in necessary educational credentials, it is important for program providers to recognize and build on the variety of strengths and aspirations individuals bring to adult education programs.

Programmatic Issues

Experiences with Adult Education Programs

Because a number of study respondents had formerly attended adult education classes, they provided extensive comments about these experiences and their interpretations of them. Other respondents had no experience with adult education but held strong opinions about what it might be like. The purpose of including these comments and interpretations is to demonstrate that current students and students who have left programs contribute to what is known about adult education and that their assumptions about what adult education programs entail can become the common knowledge that influences potential students' educational decision-making.

I didn't "fit" in/I won't "fit" in

A number of study participants indicated they didn't feel like they "fit in" with the rest of the class. When they believed their skills were substantially lower than those of other students or that they were not qualified for the program offered, respondents were often self-conscious about the amount of time and attention they required of teachers, even though they realized this extra help was needed.

> *I was comin' in kind of late in the middle of the class. As far as actually bein' part of the class, they took me out of the place and put me back here in the corner by myself. I wudn't even sittin' with them 'cause they was so far ahead of me. And I just lost interest after that.*

While this male respondent was aware that he needed extra teacher attention, he was uncomfortable being isolated from the rest of the class on the basis of his needs. From his perspective, this separation accentuated his lower abilities.

Another respondent reported she was uncomfortable attending GED classes because her reading skills were extremely poor. She believed that students like herself with limited reading skills would be more appropriately served by literacy classes rather than GED classes.

> *It would help if we could get a program in just for adults 'cause some people don't wanna admit they can't read. A lot of people went over to the adult ed. classes to learn how to read. They don't come back no more. And it's just hard for 'em. 'Cause they's a lot of people can't read. People just don't know how many.*

These comments demonstrate the importance of accurately assessing and placing

clients in classes where they can succeed and see adequate progress. The comments above also further question the feasibility of the GED as the ultimate goal for all adult education students. By focusing exclusively on the GED, adult education programs run the risk of neglecting students with limited literacy skills.

There are too many people/I'd need to work one-on-one

Study participants described a wide variety of adult education programs they had formerly attended. These ranged from classroom settings with several students of varying ability levels to individual tutoring sessions. A few respondents reported they were distracted by other students in a classroom setting and found it difficult to concentrate on their work.

> *It's like when you're sittin' in a classroom with a bunch of people and you're supposed to be doing something and your teacher is sittin' over here with the others trying to tell them something and you're not focusing on what you're doing because you're listening to them. I cannot concentrate when there's a bunch of stuff going on.*

Similarly, another respondent reported:

> *My attention span ain't too good so I'd be better off workin' somewheres by myself on a test or somethin' than I would be with a group of people. 'Cause anything gets my attention. If I'm doin' somethin' and there's somethin' goin' on over here, I can't hardly concentrate.*

These comments suggest the need for private instruction opportunities and work areas even within a classroom setting.

For example, several respondents suggested the potential benefits of smaller classes that could provide more individual attention from teachers.

> *There's quite a few students up there. I believe that's the problem because I know this one girl, she went to the eleventh grade and it still look her three years to get her GED . . . and it's all because the teacher didn't have time to sit down with her, she had to wait.*

This study participant clearly believed that large classes meant less attention for each student, a sentiment shared by other respondents as well. Respondents frequently suggested their need for more individual attention. It is beyond the scope of this research to judge whether or not programs do or do not offer enough individualized attention. A number of respondents indicated they felt one-on-one tutoring would provide them with the best possible learning situation. Working directly with an instructor can furnish students with ample teacher attention while

enabling them to work at their own pace. One-on-one instruction can also reduce the embarrassment of whole class competition or comparisons.

While several respondents indicated that working individually was highly desirable, they also wanted to receive frequent and appropriate feedback from instructors.

> *Nobody really worked with me. They just give me a workbook and put me in this room to work on it. I don't like that. I want somebody to talk to me, to help me with it. I want them to tell me what I done, let me tell them what I thought of it, what I learned.*

These comments suggest that providing adult education students with materials and a place to work is insufficient. Self-guided instruction can easily be misinterpreted as "seatwork" if the instructor does not stay with the student. They also need interaction with instructors and the opportunity to ask questions and receive direct instruction.

It was boring/It wouldn't be interesting to me

A few respondents described the adult education classes they had formerly attended as boring. In some cases, this was a general assessment of the program as indicated by the student who reported, "The center itself, you know, its just dull" Other students referred specifically to instructional materials and methods.

> *I went one time up in Indiana. And they was this older woman, she come in there and, I don't know, she just sort of bored me out. She was talkin' about "dog" and "cat" and all that stuff. I mean, I already know all that stuff. . . She had me writin' letters, and I told her, "I know all of this." I thought, "Well, we'll start here today and keep goin'," but it just stayed there and stayed and stayed.*

This student was frustrated by work that did not address his current ability level and his educational goals.

Importantly, we asked all of our interview respondents if they thought adult education classes would be interesting. When asked directly in an interview setting, most responded that they thought it would be. Experiences such as that of the student above, however, may reveal more accurate perceptions of adult education settings and are likely to be passed along. In this way, negative experiences become part of the common knowledge on which individuals base their decisions about whether or not to attend. Former students who found the work to be too hard or too easy and who did not see adequate improvement were frequently discouraged and were thus more likely to drop out of adult education programs.

Transportation, Childcare and Scheduling

Access to classes includes overcoming constraints such as a lack of childcare and/or transportation. In addition, classes must be available when potential students are able to attend. A study conducted in Western Kentucky (Freeman et. al., 1997) indicated that transportation and childcare were often listed as barriers to adult education class attendance. It is important to realize, however, that providing childcare and/or transportation will not automatically increase participation. Many parents prefer not to take young children out in the evening, even when childcare is provided.

Respondents also made suggestions about the availability and location of adult education services. Study participants frequently mentioned the desirability of programs that were nearby rather than a long distance from their homes or workplaces.

> *I'm interested in going now, I just can't get it set up and everything. I don't want to drive. You know, when you get off work sometimes, you just don't feel like doin' stuff like that. You just don't want to drive all the way across the county. I wish it was closer.*

This respondent was employed full-time and also did mechanical work out of his home. Time and distance were both critical factors for him. Another respondent reported, "If it wasn't too far away, where I could get there and get back pretty quick, that wouldn't bother me."

Most respondents indicated the need for frequent and regular interactions with instructors. One respondent who attended tutoring sessions each Friday through a welfare-to-work program reported:

> *The teacher don't give me enough time. But, it's not her fault. To learn, and what I need to learn to pass the test, I feel like I'm really just wastin' her two hours. I [need to] have a teacher who will teach more than two hours, at least three times a week, or four times a week, you know.*

Students like this one who were unable to attend classes more than once or twice weekly often judged this schedule as inadequate for their needs. They were likely to lose interest and drop out of these programs.

While many study participants discussed time constraints in the context of both work and family obligations, this assumption suggests that alleviating scheduling conflicts would immediately make it possible for clients to attend classes. In fact, the work and family commitments of potential clients are typically very complex; simply offering a wider choice of class times is unlikely to solve these problems. Certainly

the availability of adult education classes is an important consideration. Many study respondents suggested the need for hours that would better fit their schedules. Oftentimes, however, time constraints were reflective of complex family obligations and priorities as well as work schedules.

> *It's not easy, it's tough to make the time. That's the main thing. But, really, you lose time with your children doin' all that. And you don't like the things that are goin' on. You're too tired. 'Cause I know when I was in construction, I was like, "Gosh, I never see my kids. That's terrible." I thought, "Doggone, I'm the worst Mommy." But I was out here workin'. You know, I wasn't a bad Mommy, I just didn't get to spend no time with them.*

Thus, while respondents need classes to be offered at a variety of times, it is unrealistic to think that broader and more flexible class offerings will automatically enable potential clients to attend classes.

Overall, study respondents made numerous suggestions for ways their adult education needs might be better met. Participants indicated the need for classes where they felt comfortable and a part of the group. Many respondents stated the need for classes specifically for students "like me" in a variety of ways, suggesting the appropriateness of grouping students with similar ability levels and backgrounds when possible. Although few respondents indicated that having to take a "test" would deter them from participating, stories describing test-taking experiences indicate that test or performance anxiety may be a barrier to enrollment. Respondents also wanted classes where they could see reasonable progress. Few respondents were able to discuss how long it would take to reach a goal; such ambiguity can easily lead to discouragement. They also were easily frustrated by and likely to drop out of programs they described as boring and that did not result in sufficient progress. In addition, for many geographically large Kentucky counties, distance dictates that adult education programs should be offered at multiple sites to accommodate the needs of rural students.

Finally, this study demonstrates the critical role service providers play in adult education programs. This role goes far beyond individual and classroom instruction. In fact, in cases where we were able to share our findings with local adult education providers they were amazed to hear how their programs had been perceived. That these respondents did not receive the instruction they wanted or did not have access to a program they needed does not necessarily mean that those services were not offered. Unfortunately, miscommunication and misunderstandings often interfered

with successful learning experiences. The need for effective communication, adequate placement, and appropriate counseling early in the educational process is clearly indicated.

Program Overlap

Many of the respondents in our study described experiences with other educational and social welfare programs (some of which are also sponsored by the Cabinet for Workforce Development). For example, several study participants had formerly participated in Parent and Child Education (PACE) programs. Other participants were currently receiving KTAP services and participating in mandatory welfare-to-work placements. Still others had regular contact with vocational training or rehabilitation programs. Individuals receiving service from multiple programs are often frustrated by the lack of communication between programs and what they see as bureaucratic red-tape. This study provides important information about how these services are perceived.

One issue that became clear through the stories our respondents told of previous experience with education or workforce development programs was lack of consistency and relevancy. Many of our respondents spoke with frustration of their interactions with government agencies and were indiscriminate about which agency was which. Various welfare and workforce development programs were referred to in a confusing array of alphabet soup. When asked about the goals of a program or what they had learned, most of our respondents were vague or said that they did not know. Government programs were spoken of passively, "they told me to do this or to do that," with little to no sense of autonomy. There is a need for more communication among programs so that social service caseworkers and unemployment counselors are more knowledgeable about adult education opportunities. It is also important for adult education providers to play a larger advising role to help individuals navigate the confusing world of government programs and understand their rights and responsibilities.

Social Service Programs

This study demonstrates that adult education services frequently overlap with those of other social service programs and indicates the need for coordinating these services in ways that are mutually supportive. Study participants received a variety of social services that included subsidized housing, KTAP (Kentucky Temporary

Assistance Program, formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children), food stamps, Medicaid, and SSI (Social Security Insurance). A small number of participants also received vocational training or Vocational Rehabilitation services. Of these services, KTAP participation had by far the greatest influence on study participants. Twenty-five respondents (31.3% of the sample) received KTAP benefits.

KTAP participation currently requires twenty-five hours per week of paid or volunteer work experience for continued eligibility. Of these hours, only five per week can be devoted exclusively to educational programs and none of these may be spent in literacy tutoring or study unless it is specifically designed for KTAP recipients. Many KTAP respondents indicated these hours were insufficient and believed their progress toward educational goals was limited by the small number of hours that "counted" toward their work placement requirement. As one participant indicated, "They wouldn't let you go to GED classes to make up your time." Another respondent pointed out that, although her childcare was paid while she participated in her required welfare-to-work program, she could not afford additional out-of-pocket childcare expenses in order to attend GED classes in the evenings.

> *I can't go to night classes plus do my welfare-to-work in the day. 'Cause they just pays [childcare] for me to go to this class during the day. And I don't have enough money to pay for my own time to go and try to get a GED at night.*

While not all welfare recipients may be interested in pursuing further education, opportunities for more educational activities, especially those that increase the students ability to make critical decisions, would be beneficial.

The welfare-to-work programs discussed by study participants took a variety of forms. Many counties conducted mandated job readiness classes, often through local unemployment offices, that met the work requirement.

> *I've had those welfare-to-work positions, if that's what you call 'em, at the unemployment office. You have to have eight of 'em, or something? And they show you how to dress and stuff, for a job interview.*

Another respondent reported:

> *The teacher tells you what you're doing wrong, why haven't you got a job [and] how you need to dress. She gives you, like, mock interviews to show you things that people haven't shown you before, to let you know what you're doing right or what you're doing wrong for when you go out and try to find a job. How to write an interview and how to do an interview. I never knew how. How to fill out an*

application.

While some respondents found these readiness classes useful, others were more skeptical of their value.

Respondents were also frustrated by the limited time they could spend working toward educational goals as part of their mandated work experience hours. Many felt like their work placement hours detracted from time they might otherwise spend on adult education programs.

> *Two years ago I started at the Headstart and helped out down there for two years. They talked to me about the GED and they got me in a program, but I can only do it on Fridays and I'm gettin' bored with that because it's just Fridays. I'm thinkin' about quittin'. 'Cause if I had more days to go to the GED classes, well, I would even do 'em at night.*

This participant believed that her work placement effectively prevented her from attending GED classes. Given that most study respondents had limited time and energy resources to spend on adult education programs, this study suggests that, for the undereducated adults, welfare-to-work requirements often conflicted with educational goals.

The study demonstrates that on occasion social service programs failed to inform participants about other services that might benefit them.

> *I never even knew the program existed. I had come down here for heating assistance, and my friend was here, and I was like, "What are you doing here?" And she had told me she had got put on the JPTA program. And I was like, "What is that?" So really, I don't know anything about it. But after she sat down and explained it, you're like, "Well, that's a good program, I wished I had knew about that!"*

Clear communication between programs is essential for adequately meeting client needs. This study demonstrates the importance of coordinating service provision between social service and educational programs that share clients. This coordination will not only avoid unnecessary duplication of services; it can also result in improved service provision and client outcomes. The need for comprehensive service provision for low-income clients has been well documented (Haleman, 1998).

Study participants were often critical of programs they felt were impositional and capricious. Respondents at times reported they were required to participate in programs about which they were given little or no information and over which they had no control.

I'm gonna go through a computer course next month. I'm gonna have to. I don't know how I'm gonna do it. It is part of my learning efforts to be able to go out and find a job. It's goin' to be twice a week but I don't know when. I don't know when it starts. I don't know where it is. They haven't let me know anything and it's less than a week away.

Respondents reported that welfare programs frequently changed or were discontinued, leaving clients confused and frustrated by these unexplained changes. Social service providers were perceived as being unclear about program requirements and provisions on occasion. This uncertainty and inconsistency in program services was frequently disruptive and frustrating for clients. Adult education providers are in a unique position to assist their students in researching facts needed to make informed decisions. While adult education providers should not be considered caseworkers, the critical literacy skills required of individuals to make responsible choices in their everyday lives is a necessary part of an adult education curriculum. When social assistance, employment, and adult education programs share clients, there is an opportunity to work on these critical literacy skills.

Other Education Programs

In addition to their contact with social service programs, a number of study participants also reported other education experiences. Several respondents had formerly participated in the PACE program.

I took my oldest one to PACE with me. So, me and her went to school. My baby stayed over in the preschool and I went to a separate class to do my GED. I think I done the PACE for about six months at least.

PACE emphasizes family literacy and includes services for both parents and children. Participants frequently cited the childcare program as a crucial component. Most former PACE participants believed their children had enjoyed the classes and benefited from PACE involvement. Many subsequently enrolled later children in PACE classes.

Study participants, however, often reported frustration with their own progress.

I quit that PACE one day, one year, but I just got tired of it. I was aggravated and I just quit it 'cause I didn't feel like I was gettin' anywhere. And the teacher got on to me--"You need to get back and get your GED," and all that. And I went back and tried to get it, but it just didn't work.

Other respondents felt like the time they spent directly working toward educational goals was inadequate. As discussed earlier in the context of social service program overlap, respondents often felt they were spending time on other activities rather than working toward educational goals.

> *You have to have your hours in. They put you in PACE [and] you have to clean up around the school, you know, do whatever job they got you in until one, and then at one, you got an hour to work on your GED and class is over at two. So it really is no help.*

While it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the content of PACE programs, the importance of these comments lies in the fact that former participants were frustrated by their lack of progress and ultimately dropped out of the programs before reaching their goals.

Study participants had frustrating experiences with vocational education programs as well. A few respondents were currently attending vocational programs. One participant talked at length about the electrical classes he was enrolled in as part of a retraining program for displaced miners.

> *I'm goin' to vocational school for electrician's classes. But I'm goin' to quit it because you got to take classes and I just went to the eight grade and they are into this technical math and stuff. You can learn it one day and forget it the next. It's for the laid-off coal miners. They give you the classes and then you can take a test for the GED any time you want to. If you want to work on gettin' your GED, that's what it's set up for.*

These classes were taught through the local vocational school and included plumbing and air conditioning courses as well as the electrical classes this participant was enrolled in. There was no coordination with local adult education instructors to assist with remedial tutoring. His comments, however, suggest that the classes were too difficult for many participants who consequently dropped out of the program. He continued:

> *Some of 'em wouldn't even take the basic math. Some of 'em dropped out when they had to start takin' classes. It was takin' a lot of their time tryin' to do the work at home. They're droppin' out.*

While many participants in the study indicated the need for hands-on training that would translate readily to employment opportunities, these comments reinforce the importance of carefully matching programs with the abilities and needs of clients. While the goal of retraining workers is an appropriate one, the displaced miners who were participating in this program were clearly frustrated by classes that were

beyond their current academic skills. Worse, for many of these men, their transitional retraining grant is limited by time. In a situation like this, it might be possible to coordinate vocational retraining programs with adult education services designed to prepare students for more challenging classes that demand skills they do not yet possess. Adequate preparation would make it more likely that students could succeed when they reached more difficult and demanding academic classes.

The programmatic issues discussed here have important implications for adult education service provision. While lack of success in adult education programs is frequently blamed on students, it is also important to thoughtfully critique programmatic responsibility. This study indicates the need for a more client-centered approach to adult education services. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the importance of carefully coordinating adult education services with other social and educational programs. These and other implications of the study are discussed in the final section of this report.

Study Recommendations: A Client-Centered Perspective

This study has important implications for improved service delivery to adult education and literacy clients throughout Kentucky. Our focus on client perspectives was intentional from the beginning of the project and was emphasized by the research methodology and design. In-depth interviews conducted with eighty-four undereducated adults from seven sites across the state provided ample information about educational needs and goals from clients' perspectives. To briefly summarize our primary findings, this study revealed that:

- Miscommunication and misunderstandings about adult education often interfere with successful learning experiences and negatively influence educational decision-making.
- Generational differences influence adult education needs and goals; older adults who have been out of school longer and who have well established work and family responsibilities approach adult education programs very differently from younger adults who have left school more recently.
- Gender differences play an important role in determining adult education needs and goals. While men typically make adult education decisions based on employment-related factors, women more frequently structure their educational goals around family responsibilities, sometimes balancing both work and family.
- Local economic contexts significantly influence adult education decision-making; in areas where few employment options exist, adults are less likely to see the benefits of further education. Where employment opportunities do exist, adult education programs may compete with work obligations for individuals' time.

School leaving issues, learning problems, health concerns, economic hardships, and extensive work and family obligations further complicated the educational decisions of study participants. This study demonstrates that, in order to serve undereducated adults throughout the state, it is imperative that adult education programs are responsive to client viewpoints. Thus, the recommendations that emerged from this study are based on a client-centered perspective.

Our recommendations fall into two broad categories. First, we make recommendations for improved service provision from a client-centered perspective that includes a plan for additional training of adult education service providers and a strategic marketing plan for recruitment and retention of adult education students. Second, we make recommendations for further study in the adult education field that include re-examining curricular issues, exploring alternative pathways to credentialing, and investigating patterns of media consumption.

Recommendations for Improved Service Delivery

Our primary recommendation for improving service delivery to adult education clients throughout the state is a philosophical one. This study demonstrates the importance of acknowledging clients' perspectives throughout the adult education process. A client-centered approach actively involves undereducated adults in setting educational goals. Such an approach also requires recognizing negative perspectives of adult education programs and/or credentials. In sharp contrast to a "one size fits all" approach that assumes the GED is the most appropriate credential for every adult education student, a client-centered perspective will provide far more attention to individual goal-setting, support for alternative certification, and sensitivity to local attitudes toward educational credentials. Such an approach will enable clients to select from a multitude of possibilities rather than focusing narrowly and exclusively on the GED. The present study indicates that adult education providers should involve clients in the assessment and goal-setting process early on in order to discover clients' expectations, aspirations, and abilities.

Second, we recommend the development of a plan for adult education student enrollment and retention. Many of the participants in this study had formerly entered adult education programs but dropped out before reaching their goals. Thus, the present study demonstrates that retention as well as recruitment is an important issue.

Human resource practitioners in the workforce have historically viewed adult development as either person-centered or production-centered. A critique of these two approaches is that an over-emphasis on the person (self-actualization) ignores economic factors affecting the workplace and yet an over-emphasis on human capital development (producing good workers) ignores social factors that influence individual learning. An approach that balances the two, while difficult to implement, is a principled problem-solving approach (Kuchinke, 1999).

In this model individual learners are "independent, active agents who pursue a variety of goals at work—some in line with the mission of the organization, some social, some economic, and some personal" (Kuchinke, 1999, 52). In the context of adult education and workforce development, a problem-solving approach focuses on experiential learning and gives priority to experience, taking into consideration the individual's desires as well as those of society.

> Such a vision of good work will benefit not only the individual, it can also result in smart workers who have the intellectual, moral, and social fortitude and vigor to confront the social and technical problems of the workplace and arrive at innovative solutions that cannot be found within the current system (Kuchinke, 1999, 153).

How can this perspective be applied to adult education practices that are currently in place? The key is to value and respect the experiences of each potential client and to provide opportunities for learning that prioritize the active involvement of the individual in problem-solving.

By highlighting the views of adult learners and the active role individuals play in adult education decision-making, rather than the values and goals of adult education providers, this philosophy of program management acknowledges the emancipatory potential of adult education and literacy programs (Arnove, 1989; Freire, 1970; Freire and Macedo, 1987). A principled problem solving approach recognizes more than one viable outcome for adult development and that individuals must prepare for uncertain futures. Adult education providers must therefore provide:

- **Respect for the authority of the student to make rational decisions.**
- **Guidance so that those decisions are informed.**
- **Information regarding other resources in the community to assist the student in meeting his or her goals.**

A client-centered approach, therefore, does not stop with personalized service (although this should be a priority). Strategically, the client should also be seen as a partner in the learning process, as having something to teach as well as something to learn. The following recommendations support this approach:

Build on adult learners' motivations

Although a complex variety of factors often make it difficult for adults to participate in adult education programs, this study indicates that many respondents were nonetheless strongly motivated to attend classes. It is critical that adult education providers recognize and develop the positive motivators clients bring to adult education classes. For example, many respondents were motivated to attend adult education classes because of benefits for children and grandchildren.

> *My grandkids come to me wantin' me to read to 'em. It hurts when you gotta push 'em off like that. I got a grandkid that's six years old and she brought a book and said, "Papaw, read to me," and I had to push her away because I couldn't read it. That really hurts.*

These respondents wanted to improve their own skills so they would be able to help

their children with schoolwork and model educational success for them. They clearly recognized that their own educational achievements might have a positive influence on other family members. Thus, when possible, it is important for adult education providers to stress the positive effects education can have on the well being of all family members such as providing a role model for children.

Other respondents viewed adult education classes as necessary preparation for further education. They hoped to eventually attend college or vocational classes and obtaining the GED was a critical first-step in that process.

> *After I got my GED I'd like to take some college courses. I like to work with kids, maybe at a daycare or somethin'. Or helping handicapped kids. That's what I would like to do.*

Another respondent had been promised a salary increase if she completed her GED and entered college.

> *That's why I want to go to college, [to] go into business management. If I was to get into college they've already told me it's gonna make a big difference [in salary].*

For these individuals, obtaining the GED is an avenue to further educational and employment opportunities. Although only a small number of respondents indicated they intended to pursue further education beyond the GED, for these individuals this is an important and powerful incentive.

Finally, a number of respondents indicated that attending adult education classes would enable them to fulfill personal goals they had set for themselves. For these individuals, self-fulfillment is a strong motivator.

> *I done explained to my kids that I need my GED because I want it. I don't know if it would help me, really, in a job, but I just want that GED. It's just somethin' I want, you know.*

Another respondent indicated he would like to obtain his GED because he was the only one in his family who had not graduated from high school and he knew it would make his mother happy if he completed the GED.

> *I want to do it before my mom dies just to let her know that I did it. You know what I'm saying, because she told me a long time ago--I haven't said this to nobody--she said that all her kids graduated but me and she said if I could just do this before she dies she would be happy. That stuck in my head and I think about it all the time.*

Another individual wanted to improve her reading ability in order to increase her confidence in negotiating the workplace. This research suggests that it is important for adult education instructors to help clients discover the incentives that are most

valuable for them as individuals. Helping adult education students identify motivators and set positive and realistic goals are powerful ways providers can encourage and support adult learners.

Counsel Rather than Test

For many individuals, the current assessment process (TABE testing) is perceived as demeaning and becomes a disincentive to return to class. While a few respondents indicated they were uncomfortable in testing situations, however, most participants recognized the advantage of accurately determining their skill level as they entered an adult education program. It was not the test itself, therefore, that caused the discomfort as many found initial assessment a useful starting point. Rather, testing introduces associations of schooling that may trigger negative reactions.

This research documents the need for appropriate and accurate assessment and counseling upon entry into the adult education system. It is important to follow up on assessment with extensive and realistic goal-setting that actively involves clients and addresses any feelings of discomfort. From this point, adult education providers and clients can work together to determine the most appropriate course of study. Respondents indicated the need for programs that both challenge them and simultaneously allow for steady, visible progress. It is also important to reassess client progress toward goals continually and to modify educational plans when necessary.

For several study participants, taking the pretest or the GED test itself was a critical event. Numerous respondents dropped out of adult education programs after failing the exam, making it clear that this is a point at which clients need extensive support.

> *I did take my GED classes for a year and I went and took my GED test and lacked two points passin' and I never did go back. It's been about five years ago.*

This woman very nearly completed the GED but stopped when she did not pass the exam. She continues:

> *I'll give anything a try as long as there is somebody there to help me if I need help. I guess after I didn't make my GED I just got down-hearted about it and I didn't even fool with goin' back to the classes. I didn't fool with callin' the teacher. I don't want to [go back] 'cause I got down-hearted about it 'cause I didn't pass. I mean, I come so close, it just brought me down.*

Another student related a similar experience

> *I took GED classes and they told me I was ready and I took the pre-test and everything for them and passed, and went to take the final exam to get my GED and failed it. Passed everything else but English. It's been a while. Probably by now I'd have to retake the whole thing.*

As these comments indicate, providing immediate follow-up for those students who do not initially pass the GED exam is a critical part of any retention program.

Emphasize Relevance

Offering students a variety of activities with clear practical applications and opportunities for active learning is more likely to keep students participating and to result in student success. While it is unrealistic to expect adult education programs to constantly meet the individual needs of all students, it is important that students work with materials they believe to be appropriate a majority of the time. Again, this requires that instructors listen carefully to the students' expectations and aspirations for their learning experience. This may require using materials that are not immediately part of the GED curriculum even though they may seem ready to prepare for GED certification. For example, one of our respondents was very interested in history and enjoyed historical programming on television. Relevant educational materials for this potential student might be texts that bridge his interest in history with his work experiences while building his critical reading skills.

Relevance also refers to the demographic make-up of the classroom. Older students, for example, may not perceive a program as relevant to them if all the other students are younger. Despite the fact that adult education programs usually feature individualized instruction where students proceed at their own pace, most adults still perceive of a "class" as having one curriculum and one pace. They may judge the needs of students who are significantly older or younger as having different goals and therefore do not see the class as relevant to their needs.

Recognize Resistance

Many study respondents resented certification programs required for employment or promotion regardless of their seniority or experience. When potential students reject or participate reluctantly in adult education programs, their reluctance may be due to a reasonable evaluation of the GED or other credentials as required but not necessary for their current work environment. Our interviews with Department of Transportation workers, for example, revealed that employees were frustrated and

sometimes fearful of credentialing requirements for promotion within the department. In another example, an older worker complained:

> *You know, some of the factories they bring in, you're going to have to have a GED. Looks to me like it's discriminating all together. You're not dumb because you don't have a GED. Anybody can get out here and run a forklift or something, you know.*

While continuing education may indeed provide beneficial skills and opportunities for individuals to pursue less physically-intensive jobs and work that is less vulnerable to market forces, to require education and ignore experience alienates workers who are proud of their skills and aware of the scope of the local labor market.

The Significance of Location

Most Kentuckians are familiar with the complaints of those who do not live in Central Kentucky of how the Bluegrass region receives more than its share of political attention and economic resources. It is important to understand that many rural residents who live outside of county seats and larger towns feel a similar resentment toward their regional centers. School consolidation has caused many smaller communities to lose their sense of ownership over education. Some of our respondents described moving to larger schools in larger towns as part of their reason for leaving school. Having to drive to "town" to participate in adult education may revive old feelings of discomfort and displacement.

Recent efforts to avoid duplication of services have resulted in the centralization of adult education programs administratively and, sometimes, geographically (in terms of class location). This approach may estrange individuals who resent the location of programs in municipal areas, sometimes more than thirty minutes away. Our informal phone survey of providers in the state indicates that most adult education students travel no further than ten minutes from their homes to class.

Some of the providers with whom we spoke mourned the failure of outreach projects intended to lessen some of these distances. Their failure to attract and retain students, however, should not be attributed to location or the attitudes of a particular region, but rather to the complex issues and misconceptions regarding adult education described by this report. Unfortunately, resource constraints may make centralized services a continuing necessity; however, recognition of the pride residents place on their own neighborhoods and villages may help providers communicate with rural populations when advertising programs. Determining the appropriate location of adult education programs should include the input of current and potential students.

Recommendations for Additional Training for Instructors

- Improve Services for Students with Learning Disabilities

This study demonstrates the need for providers who are specifically trained to work with adult students who have a variety of special needs including learning difficulties. A considerable number of study participants recognized that they had learning problems that made it difficult for them to do well in adult education classes. In order to succeed in adult education programs, these clients need adult education instructors who have been trained specifically to work with students who struggle in academic learning environments. Study respondents also indicated the need for hands-on activities with practical applications in contrast to the "book work" they often found discouraging, dull, or irrelevant. Adult education providers need further training and guidance in presenting materials in a variety of ways that will actively engage adult students in the learning process.

- Improve Services for ESL Students

This study also demonstrates the need for instructors who have been specifically trained to work with ESL populations. The need for ESL services is increasing in many Kentucky counties. The limited information collected here indicates that this is an important area where providers need extensive resources and further training. While it may not be possible for every adult education site to provide trained ESL workers, regional collaboration between programs can help meet this need. It may also be possible for adult education providers to collaborate with other community service agencies that work with ESL populations to coordinate services.

- Expand the Advisory Role of Adult Education Providers to Address Barriers

Finally, adult education providers need additional training in assessment and counseling above and beyond the teaching and tutoring skills usually associated with adult education. The client-centered perspective we have recommended necessitates an increased advisory role for providers. Actively involving clients in the goal-setting process will require providers who are trained in human resource skills. It is also important that providers recognize themselves as part of an integrated team of educators that includes not only adult education services but a broad range of other social programs as well. The present study demonstrated that often clients lack information about other programs that might be beneficial to them. Training

providers to work with other community services can result in improved outcomes for clients.

Recommendations for Strategic Enrollment Management & Marketing

In the field of higher education, enrollment management refers to "institutional efforts to influence the characteristics and the size of enrolled student bodies..." (Hossler, Bean & Assoc.1990). An examination of some of the principles of post-secondary enrollment management may prove useful to increasing participation in adult education programs.

Creating Strategic Organizations

Many of the problems associated with the recruitment and retention of students in post-secondary institutions can be attributed to traditional organizational structures where individual departments operate as separate units. The emphasis on increasing enrollment and retention, in traditional post-secondary institutional structures, often falls on recruitment and admissions departments. Staff and faculty working in the classroom or advising office often do not consider themselves as part of "retention" efforts. This is changing as retention research demonstrates that strategic enrollment management, a coordination of practices across all areas of student activity, is necessary for increased retention and graduation rates (Hossler, Bean & Assoc., 1990).

Likewise, increasing adult education enrollment and retention should be seen as a holistic project, including advertising, recruitment, assessment, instruction, student to student interactions, and coordination with other social service and educational programs. Changing promotional materials or designing a new retention program in the classroom will only be successful if all other aspects of the program are also considered.

In addition, the public sees adult education services as part of a continuum of educational and vocational choices, both formal and informal. Management of adult education enrollments should consider that continuum. Most importantly, adult education programs must reconsider their public image and make efforts to update that image to reflect local priorities above and beyond GED preparation. For example, in areas of ample employment opportunities this might mean emphasizing basic skills upgrades for older workers seeking advancement, working with employers and employment services to satisfy their certification needs. In an area of low employment, however, an emphasis on family or community education might be more appropriate. The goal is to recognize innovative and flexible ways of running and organizing your program.

Marketing adult education services

All of the adult education programs located in our research sites advertise their services. Like programs across the state, they make use of flyers and public access signage and media. These techniques, however, rely on luck and the interest of the potential student to be successful. They assume that the individual will know what adult education programs offer and require and that individuals will want the programs offered. Traditional promotion does nothing to dispel myths that might discourage attendance.

For example, education does not always "pay" as promised by Governor Patton's "Education Pays" initiative. The "Education Pays" campaign is a public relations strategy to sell education to individuals who the governor says, "...do not fully realize the impact on their lives of not educating themselves to their individual maximum capacity." This campaign may not be effective for adult education enrollments as it underestimates the values undereducated adults hold for learning and ignores negative impressions individuals may have about "school-like" settings and negative experiences individuals may have had or heard about credentials that do not increase employment or wages. Our research indicates that undereducated adults do realize the value of further education, but may not feel that the programs available are useful to them personally.

We understand that the current emphasis on workforce investment requires that state agencies consider social good as well as individual development. Marketing a service that benefits both the individual and society is referred to as societal marketing. Kotler defines the goal of societal marketing as

> ...to determine the needs, wants, and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the consumer's and the society's well being (1986, 17).

A societal marketing approach prioritizes the assessment of consumers' goals as well as workforce development initiatives. Importantly, we cannot assume that these are the same goals. Adult educators and policy makers should not assume to know what undereducated adults "need" nor should they assume that economic factors are always the most important variables in educational decision-making.

Setting Marketing Goals

Strategic enrollment management requires identifying and recruiting students from specific target markets. The notion of selecting a market may seem troubling

because of the implication that certain groups of individuals will be left out. This is not necessarily the case, although choices of how, when, and where to spend resources must be made. By purposefully identifying multiple markets for adult education, rather than trying to serve everyone in the same way, more individuals can be served more effectively. Our research indicates that the potential market for adult education in the state is a diverse one and effective marketing will require a "marketing mix" of services and message.

Target markets are selected by analyzing and forecasting demand, identifying market segmentation, and positioning the "product" within the marketplace. The following section will discuss how these marketing concepts might be applied to adult education.

Demand. The current market determines demand. Adult education programs in the state currently only serve 5% of under-educated adults, therefore increasing demand is obviously a priority. Our research indicates, however, that it is not simply a lack of motivation that has led to such low participation in adult education. A variety of competing priorities often impede participation. The current market should therefore include potential students as well as those currently attending classes. In addition, an important market for increasing the demand for adult education are those individuals who show no interest in adult education (at least at this time) and yet who respect the value of learning and self-improvement. While these individuals are not likely students, their impressions of adult education contribute to "common knowledge" about adult education programs. Their opinions, good and bad, may influence the educational decisions of their friends and family.

Market Segmentation and "Product" Development: Market segmentation refers to "dividing a market into distinct groups of buyers who might require separate product or marketing mixes" (Kotler, 1986, 263). For adult education programs, this means determining who potential students may be and what kind of adult education program, if any, they are most likely to want. If individuals have chosen not to participate in the past, then the adult education provider must assume they have not been offered a "product" that they found attractive, convenient, or needed. Our research indicates that the GED, for example, is not always considered appropriate or valuable. What other educational program or credential might be more useful?

For adult education providers, understanding market segmentation also involves reaching potential students at their level of ability and in ways that meet their expectations and aspirations for learning. This requires recognizing the diverse

experiences and abilities of the population served. Our research indicates that gender, age, educational experiences, work experiences, pressures of the local economic environment, and individual learning styles are attributes that should guide program development.

Market Position or Image. Adult education providers must realize that they compete with work, family, and community responsibilities for potential students' time and interest. "Marketing is really a process in which organizations battle for position in the consumer's mind" (Ries and Trout, 1980). Historically, adult education has held a position in the public eye as something connected to the public education system. Providers should recognize that adult education's public image affects choices regarding participation as much as educational values held by the individual. The location of sites in schools and the emphasis on the GED as high school equivalency strongly ties adult education to "school" in the minds of the public. Recent efforts to associate adult education with vocational education with the location of programs within KCTCS and One-Stop centers may serve to shift this association toward workforce development. In its current form, however, adult education has to struggle to be considered part of everyday adult priorities.

Our research indicates that associations with "school" for many of our respondents are negative; thus, adult education suffers from anti-school sensibilities. Alternatively, vocational education or training is recognized as valuable and/or necessary for financial stability; however, adult education is often seen as an obstacle to that opportunity. You will soon have to have your GED to be admitted into most post-school programs, thus putting post-secondary educational opportunities out of reach for many individuals. The GED and, by association, adult education, is a hurdle to overcome in order to gain access to training opportunities. In these ways, adult education currently occupies a negative market position.

Effective marketing of adult education means positioning programs in such a way as to serve the interests of potential clients and avoid negative attributions. If adult education is seen as an obstacle to vocational training, for example, this is something that needs to be addressed. Finally, strategic marketing of adult education should focus on changing the reputation, structure, and position of current programs in their local contexts rather than public attitudes regarding education in general.

Recommendations for Further Study

The present study indicates several areas for additional research

What other populations should be served?

As mentioned above, this study provided little information about ESL populations, an important area for further study. It is important to gather demographic information about ESL populations as well as information from providers about the services they currently offer. While undereducated adults with limited English skills face many issues in common with other adult education clients, including work and educational experiences, they also face unique challenges that stem from language and cultural transitions.

What is the culture of the adult education classroom?

The present study gathered limited information about adult education curricula from a client or provider perspective. Because many study respondents had experienced earlier school difficulties, including experiences in adult education programs, it is especially important to examine the ways adult education settings are "school-like" and to recognize that such programs may dissuade some clients from participating.

What kinds of alternative curricula are possible?

Alternative forms of instruction, perhaps borrowed from vocational education or workplace training models, may be more appropriate for adult education students than "book learning" that reinforces earlier school difficulties. The content of the current curriculum also contributes to the culture of the adult education classroom and to the perception of adult education as "school-like". Further locally specific research regarding the relevance of program content for students would help providers serve their constituency.

What kinds of alternative credentials are possible?

Further research that explores alternatives to the GED as a required credential is also indicated. Many of the individuals who participated in this study clearly believed the GED to be an inappropriate workplace requirement given the kinds of labor in which they typically engaged. These individuals challenged the traditional view of the GED as a commodity. Additional research should explore alternatives pathways to workplace credentialing that may include a continuum of post-school

educational experiences

Similarly, the GED may not be the most appropriate certification program for individuals who, because of disabilities or other constraints, may not be able to pass the GED exam within a reasonable period of time. Although most programs try to help new students set goals for themselves, the overwhelming image of adult education as GED preparation may make other goals seem less meaningful and, without certification, less valuable in the workplace.

What about math?

When describing what they might find useful in the adult education curriculum, many of our respondents mentioned math skills. Further research regarding fears under-educated adults might hold toward math, obstacles to success in learning math, and alternatives to the GED math curricula such as book-keeping or developmental math specific to vocational training should be pursued. Post-secondary research indicates that low math skills may pose the greatest obstacle to post-secondary success, thus indicating the need for increased attention to math skills in all areas of adult and continuing education.

What about computer literacy?

Many respondents mentioned computers and technology as being important to success "these days". Most, however, seemed generally unfamiliar with what computer literacy might mean. One woman was thrilled to have been selected, through a welfare-to-work program, for a special computer course. Another respondent said that a "good" adult education program should include computer training. Further research into the interest undereducated adults may have for computer education is necessary.

What kind of media is best for promoting adult education?

Finally, we suggest the need for market research in media consumption that would disclose potential avenues for disrupting myths and assumptions about adult education experiences. Many respondents mentioned television as one source of information about adult education programming. Often described as "the Barney Channel," public television does seem to have an audience among this population. While few participants had taken advantage of GED classes via television, this medium may provide a fruitful way to communicate information about adult education services to potential clients. Any research or policy decision regarding media communications should reflect a total assessment of local media consumption

patterns including commercial and cable stations. For example, when asked what he thought makes a person educated or intelligent, a retired coal miner with an eighth grade education responded:

> *Different things, you know. The educational things that's on TV. Like, The Discovery Channel ...just to pay attention and try to learn, watching television, talkin' to people, reading the paper, reading a book, or something like that.*

Marketing efforts that reach out to individuals who listen to local radio shows or who watch Nova and programs on the Discovery Channel may provide a means to dispel misunderstandings and myths about adult education programs

Limitations of the current study

Under-represents minority and urban perspectives

While the present study has supplied much useful information about adult education programs from a client-centered perspective, it has several limitations that must be acknowledged. This study provided little information about minority populations. By far the majority of study participants were white and the experiences of African American and Hispanic respondents are underrepresented. This reflects the demographics of the counties studied. The educational needs and goals of minority members may differ in important ways from those of whites; these differences need to be explored further.

While our qualitative research design worked well with rural communities, it was seriously hampered in a more urban setting. The kinds of informational and support networks that allowed us to locate study participants in more rural settings were not fruitful in an urban context. In fact, we were unable to conduct interviews in the metropolitan county included in our study, despite its rural character. This suggests the need for an alternative research design, perhaps including more extensive ethnographic fieldwork, if further information is needed on undereducated adults in urban and suburban settings.

Speculative responses

Some of our research questions were more useful than others. We found that the answers given to some of our questions were too speculative to provide valid information, although they did provide insights into how adult education is perceived. Specifically, our qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that questions regarding how programs could be improved or how services could be

Specifically, our qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that questions regarding how programs could be improved or how services could be expanded in terms of scheduling and location yielded inconclusive and, more importantly, misleading results when analyzed quantitatively.

Given these limitations, however, the study provides ample evidence that undereducated adults value education and that they are needful of educational services. Many of the common assumptions about undereducated adults--that they are unmotivated, lazy, unconcerned about education--are clearly dispelled by this study. Rather, the lives of undereducated Kentuckians are affected by complex and interrelated demands that often prevent them from successfully setting and reaching educational goals.

Appendix A: Methodology

Research Design: The research study was conducted in four parts. Phase one of the project consisted of selecting the counties to be studied, a process that involved the Department of Adult Education and Literacy staff. Phase two entailed compiling background data on all counties in Kentucky in order to provide context for the sites under study and to provide baseline data for use in future program planning. Phase three consisted of the actual fieldwork in each of the eight sites using a four-member research team. Phases two and three occurred simultaneously. Phase four involved analysis of the data and final write up.

Phase One: Selection of Case Study Sites

Using data from available databases and information provided by the Kentucky Department for Adult Education and Literacy, eight counties (including the pilot site) were selected for comparative study. These sites were chosen to represent diverse economic regions and were geographically distributed across the state.

Site Selection Matrix

Economic Type	Western Kentucky	Central Kentucky	Eastern Kentucky
Farming	Breckenridge, Carlisle, McLean	Casey, Larue, Green, Robertson, Spencer, Washington	None
Mining	Hopkins, Livingston, Muhlenberg, Ohio, Union, Webster	None	Bell, Breathitt, Clay, Floyd, Harlan, Knott, Leslie, Letcher, Magoffin, Martin, Perry, Pike
Manufacturing	Allen, Ballard, Barren, Butler, Graves, Grayson, Hancock, Logan, Marshall, Monroe, Simpson, Todd	Anderson, Boyle, Carroll, Harrison, Mason, Mercer, Nelson, Nicholas, Russell, Shelby, Taylor, Wayne	None
Government	Edmonson, Hardin, Lyon	Franklin, McCreary	Elliott, Menifee, Owsley, Rowan, Wolfe
Services	McCracken	Pulaski, Trimble	Johnson, Lawrence, Lee, Whitley
Nonspecialized	Caldwell, Calloway, Crittenden, Fulton, Hickman, Meade, Trigg, Warren,	Adair, Bath, Bracken, Clinton, Cumberland, Garrard, Hart, Henry, Lincoln, Marion, Metcalfe, Owen, Rockcastle,	Estill, Fleming, Jackson, Knox, Laurel, Lewis, Montgomery, Morgan, Powell
Metropolitan	Christian, Henderson, Daviess,	Bullitt, Jefferson, Oldham, Fayette, Jessamine, Madison, Woodford, Scott, Clark, Bourbon, Boone, Kenton, Campbell, Grant, Pendleton, Gallatin	Boyd, Carter, Greenup,

Note: Non-specialized refers to counties in which no one economic category dominates. May also indicate economic distress.

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Phase Two: Compilation of Background Data

The process of collecting background data for each site resulted in the gathering of descriptive statistics of counties not selected for study. These data included brief descriptions of available adult education programs, hours of operation, summary of services provided, and providers' perspectives on primary reasons for non-participation.

Phase Three: Collection of Comparative Case Study Data & Initial Analysis

The purpose of this phase of the research was to complete eight independent case studies including 10-15 in-depth interviews in each site with individuals who have chosen not to participate in adult education programming. In addition to these target population interviews, each case study also included informal interviews and participant observation in locations of public talk regarding educational decision-making. These sites included workplaces, social service agencies, adult education programs, career centers, and other appropriate locations. All research activities were documented through extensive notetaking and these records were shared between sites. Initial contact was made in each location by early May while the bulk of the interviews were conducted from June through August of 1999.

In addition to the target population interviews, informational interviews with current adult education participants and recent program completers were also conducted when appropriate, as were focus group interviews. A total of eighty-four individual interviews with target population respondents, four focus group interviews, and five informational interviews were conducted.

Phase Four: Analysis and Write Up

All interviews were tape recorded and fully transcribed. Interview transcripts were then coded in two ways. This mixed-method analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative components.

Quantitative analysis

After being transcribed, all interviews were coded for various demographic and descriptive information. Coding schemes were generated by the principal investigators, and members of the interviewing team. Transcripts were coded by one advanced doctoral student. In addition, 15% of the transcripts were coded by one of the interviewers, using the identical coding scheme.

Open coding

Each set of field notes, transcripts, and documents were analyzed by a three-member qualitative research team using open coding techniques. This process involved multiple readings of the transcripts. Initial reading categories were based on economic criteria as suggested by the pilot study (mining, manufacturing and/or service, and non-specialized). After this initial reading, key themes emerged that suggested additional readings of the data. These subsequent readings specifically addressed gender differences, age/generational differences, the influence of learning difficulties, and work-related issues. Given the emergent design of the study, themes continued to shift throughout the analysis phase. The qualitative research team met weekly to discuss thematic issues.

Focused coding

Using themes selected from the open coding process, a coding scheme was developed and each transcript was subsequently coded and re-analyzed by the research team. This focused coding allowed patterns and variations in relationships between categories to emerge. In addition, the use of focused coding allowed a more comprehensive and thorough investigation of the interview transcripts.

Write Up

The final report represents a final phase of analysis as the data were organized to elucidate the emergent themes. For each theme, quotations from the interview transcripts were chosen to illustrate the point.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Name:

Date:

Interviewer Comments:

PART ONE Demographics

1) How long have you lived in _____ ?
2) Gender: Male Female
3) How many people live in your household?
4) How many dependent children do you have (if any)?
   a What level of schooling have they achieved?
   b Where do they go to school (if school age)?
   c Who is their primary care-giver?
5) Are there any other dependents in your household?
6) What was the last grade of formal schooling you attended and when?

NOTES: Some individuals might be reluctant to talk about their family...and questions about marriage and dependent children should be asked very carefully. If the informant is very uncomfortable with these questions return to them later in the interview. These questions help establish family patterns of educational achievement as well as mobility. If we know where their children have gone to school, we are more likely to be able to ascertain where and when they have moved and for what reason.

PART TWO: Narrative Interview

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

The following questions are designed to be positive...we do not want the interview participant to feel ashamed or embarrassed about their educational experiences. We do, however, want to determine what kinds of obstacles they may have faced in completing or continuing their education. Throughout the rest of the interview, listen carefully for comments regarding reasons the individual may have chosen not to begin or continue a program or course. Without dwelling on negative experiences, probe these comments for more detailed explanations. Be careful, however, of allowing the interview to sink into a complaint of past misfortune. It is equally important to understand what opportunities they have experienced.

1) Tell me about your formal education. Where did you attend school? For how long? When you were in school, did you do well? Why or why not? What were the circumstances that resulted in you leaving school?
2) How would you describe yourself as a student?
3) What kind of education did your parents have? Your siblings?
4) Have any members of your family attended post-secondary education programs?

Ask any or all of these questions to get the individual in a "storytelling" frame of mind about their educational experiences. Try to get them to tell a little about themselves as learners...what kind of students were they (i.e. didn't try hard, it was boring, some teachers were good, but, etc.). Later, if this information has not arisen naturally, ask the causes of their leaving formal schooling.

EDUCATIONAL & WORK EXPERIENCES

5) What did you do after you left school?
6) What kind of educational or training experiences have you had since that time?
7) Have you ever taken any kind of placement tests or skills tests?
8) What kind of work experiences have you had since that time?
9) Have you ever participated in a training or education program at work?
10) Have you ever considered pursuing an adult education program or going to get your GED?

Try to get them to begin the story at the point that they left formal schooling. If this seems to be uncomfortable for them, try to find a point in their life history about which they feel confident. If they took an assessment test such as TABE, probe for the location and context of that experience. Keep probing for learning experiences with the following questions.

11) Can you give me an idea of a typical weekday for you? How about a weekend?
12) On average, how many total hours per week do you spend at work?
13) Do you ever work at night? If so, how many nights and what times?
14) Do you ever work on weekends? If so, how often and what times?

Hopefully the interview will have already revealed some of the individual's personal values toward education. If his or her answers seem overly superficial, ask probing questions to elicit value statements regarding education. Our goal is to determine how individuals perceive the role of education in their lives--in their own words, rather than what they think we want to hear or what they have heard others say. Once this is accomplished, we then want to probe how they think others in their family (or community) perceive adult education and how this might influence their perceptions. When asking about their typical day, probe for information about recreation, family responsibilities and other aspects of their lives that might interfere with continuing their education.

PERSONAL AND FAMILY VALUES & GOALS

The following questions are intended to determine what kinds of motivating factors may influence the interview participant's decision making. Try to press the individual to be as specific as possible.

15) What kind of learning experiences do you feel are most valuable for you? Your family and friends?
16) What do you think makes a person educated or intelligent?
17) What do you think prepares a person for work?

18) How do you think your family would feel about you starting an educational program? Would they be supportive? Have they supported you in the past when you've tried this sort of thing?
19) What goals do you have for yourself? What would you like to be doing five years from now?
20) What goals do you have for your family or children?

In these last questions, probe particularly for issues of status and stigma especially with regard to women who might face trouble at home if they pursue further education or for men who may feel stigmatized by going "back to school".

ADULT EDUCATION PARTICIPATION

The goal of these questions is to determine what, if any, conscious decisions they have made about continuing their formal education. If they are quick to dismiss these questions, try to return to their "story" and ask specifically about decisions they might have made during transitional time periods. For example, "After you got divorced, did you ever think about going back to school?" or "When you got on at the plant, did anyone suggest you go for more training or education?"

21) Tell me what you know about adult education programs in your community
22) Would it matter to you if you had to take a test to start an adult education program?
23) Do you think the information that you might learn about in an adult education program would:
   a) be useful?
   b) be interesting?
   c) be important?
24) Do you have friends or family members who have participated in these programs? If so, how do they feel about them?
25) If you entered an adult education program, would you be concerned about:
   a. what other people in the program thought about you?
   b. what your friends and family thought about you?
26) Would you be concerned about looking "dumb" if you were in an adult education program? 27) Would you be concerned about looking smarter than others?

Hopefully these questions will already have been answered in context. If not, make one more attempt to have the individual be specific about their perceptions of adult education and possible barriers. Be sure to ask the individual to distinguish between what is useful (practical) and what is interesting or important. Try to get them to define usefulness.

28) What do you think are the major barriers that prevent you from participating in adult education programs? What factors would make it easier or more likely for you to take part in these kinds of programs?
29) If you enrolled in an adult education program, how much time would you be willing to devote to it? Would you be able to work on it at home? If it took more than a year to meet your goals, would you continue?
30) If you enrolled in an adult education program, how do you think you'd do? Would you be successful?

These questions are key. If the individual has not yet stated explicitly how he or she feels about the possibility of pursuing some form of adult education, try to determine his or her reasons. Try to avoid generalized statements, using the individual's "story" to contextualize his or her rationale. Challenge each excuse or complaint with

another what if statement (i e. what if transportation could be provided, would you go then, etc.) Probe for expected outcomes.

31) If GED classes were offered in your place of work (or child's school/daycare, etc.), would you go?
   a) If classes were offered _____ instead of _____ would you go?
   b) Would it bother you if classes were offered at _____ instead of _____?

Based on the location of adult education providers currently available in the area, fill in the blanks with options in the area.

32) If your place of work (or child's school/daycare, etc.), offered you something for participating in a program, would you go?

Based on the individual, ask about incentives at work such as raises or bonuses, incentives for the family such as family literacy programs, etc.

32) Would it bother you if your co-workers or other parents (etc.) knew you were continuing your education? What other kinds of things might bother you enough to keep you from going?

Part Three: Follow Up

1) What is your current age? ____
2) Race: White, African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, Other
3) Do you own your own home? (house, farm, or mobile home?)
4) What kind of transportation do you have?
5) What kinds of things do you like to read?
6) Have you ever used a library?
7) Have you ever used a computer?

On the last three questions, probe for context and opportunity. For example, do they use the bookmobile or their child's school library? Have they ever had access to a computer and in what context?

Let me make sure I understand:

8) You are/are not currently receiving KTAP or other government assistance?

9) You do/do not have any plans for continuing your education or getting your GED?

10) The most primary motivator for you would be _____?

11) The biggest deterrent for you would be _____?

12) When was the last time you attended a GED program or took a GED test?

Phrase these questions to paraphrase their earlier narrative. You may want to overstate their position so that they are forced to clarify and/or correct you. Question 11 is intended to double check in case we missed something earlier on about a previous adult education experience.

Appendix C: Quantitative Results

After being transcribed, all interviews were coded for various demographic and descriptive information. The principal investigators and members of the interviewing team generated coding schemes. One advanced doctoral student coded transcripts. In addition, 15% of the transcripts were coded by one of the interviewers, using the identical coding scheme.

Description of Sample

Table One contains a breakdown of demographic characteristics of the sample, including descriptions of the number of respondents by county, gender, number of children, home ownership, marital status, and whether or not the respondent receives KTAP.

Table One: Description of Sample

Variable	Categories	N	Percentage
County	West 1	12	14.3%
	West 2	12	14.3%
	West 3	17	20.2%
	East 1	9	10.7%
	East 3	12	14.3%
	East 2	13	15.5%
	Central	9	10.7%
Gender	Female	39	46.4%
	Male	44	52.4%
Number of Children	0	29	36.3%
	1	18	22.5%
	2	17	21.3%
	3	7	8.8%
	4	5	6.3%
	5	3	3.8%
	6	1	1.3%
Home Ownership	Does not own home	41	52.6%
	Owns home	37	47.4%

Marital Status	Unmarried	33	41.3%
	Married	47	58.8%
KTAP	No KTAP	56	70.0%
	Receives KTAP	24	30.0%
Hours Worked	Does not work	27	37.0%
	10-36 hours/week	8	11.0%
	40 hours/week	26	35.6%
	More than 40 hours	12	16.4%
Work Nights	No night work	61	81.3%
	Works nights	14	18.7%
Knowledge About Adult Education	No knowledge	21	25.9%
	Knows a specific program and location	47	58.0%%
	Doesn't know specifics, but knows whom to ask	13	16.0%
Knows Participants	Friends/family have participated	49	64.5%
	Friends/family have not participated	27	35.5%
Has respondent heard negative things about programs?	No negatives	78	94.0%
	Has heard negatives	5	6.0%

Note Full sample size = 84; some data are missing for non-English speaking participants.

Sample Characteristics By Gender

Several demographic characteristics were examined by gender of participant. These data are presented in Table Two. More females than males report receiving KTAP (^{2} (1) = 12.04, p<.001). Specifically, of all of the KTAP recipients in the sample, 25% are male, whereas 75% are female; in contrast, of the participants who do not receive KTAP, 67.3% are male, whereas only 32.7% are female. Of the respondents who own their own home, significantly more participants are male (70.3%) than are female (29.7%), ^{2} (1) = 6.01, p<.01. Female participants reported having more school-aged children living at home than did males (M_{Female} = 1.87, M_{Male} = 1.02, t (77) = -2.56, p<.01). Females were m ore likely than were males to report being unemployed, whereas males were more likely than females to report being employed full-time, ^{2} (2) = 13.88, p<.001.

Table Two: Sample Characteristics By Gender

Variable	Categories	Male	Female
KTAP Participation***	Does not receive KTAP	37 (67.3%)	18 (32.7%)
	Receives KTAP	6 (25%)	18 (75%)
Home Ownership**	Does not own home	17 (42.5%)	23 (57.5%)
	Does own home	26 (70.3%)	11 (29.7%)
Previous Experience with Adult Education	Has not had friend or relative in adult education	16 (59.3%)	11 (40.7%)
	Has had a friend or relative in adult education	24 (49.0%)	25 (51.0%)
Library Usage	Never used a library	18 (69.2%)	8 (30.8%)
	Has used a library	23 (47.9%)	25 (52.1%)
Number of children**	Mean number of children	1.02	1.87

Current Employment***	Part-time/self-employed/placement	4 (36.4%)	7 (63.6%)
	Unemployed	9 (32.1%)	19 (67.9%)
	Employed Full-time	30 (75%)	10 (25%)
Motivation for Adult Education*	For money or job-related reasons	22 (61.1%)	14 (38.9%)
	For the sake of learning	15 (75%)	5 (20%)
	For family-related reasons	4 (9.3%)	11 (73.3%)
	No motivation	2 (40%)	3 (60%)

- $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$ *** $p<.001$

Sample Characteristics By Age

Participants in the study were broken down into three age categories: ages 18-24 (21.8%), ages 25-45 (55.1%), and ages 46 and older (23.1%). Descriptive data were examined separately for each age group. These data are presented in Table Three. Several variables exhibited differences across age groups. Older participants were more likely than younger participants to report that they owned their own home (χ^2 (2) = 14.29, $p<.001$). Library usage also varies by age. Of those participants who reported having never used a library, a smaller percentage were in the youngest group (7.7%) than in the oldest group (38.5%), χ^2 (2) = 9.35, $p<.01$. In contrast, only 12.5% of those who reported having used a library were in the oldest group. Older participants reported having significantly fewer children living at home than did both the youngest and the middle-aged group, $F(2, 75) = 7.30$, $p<.001$.

Table Three: Sample Characteristics by Age

Variable	Categories	Ages 18-24	Ages 25-45	Ages 46+
KTAP Participation	Does not receive KTAP	12 (22.2%)	27 (50%)	15 (27.8%)
	Receives KTAP	5 (20.8%)	16 (66.7%)	3 (12.5%)

Home Ownership***	Does not own home	14 (35.9%)	22 (56.4%)	3 (7.7%)
	Does own home	3 (8.1%)	20 (54.1%)	14 (37.8%)
Previous Experience with Adult Education	Has not had friend or relative in adult education	6 (22.2%)	12 (44.4%)	9 (33.3%)
	Has had a friend or relative in adult education	10 (20.8%)	29 (60.4%)	9 (18.8%)
Library Usage**	Never used a library	2 (7.7%)	14 (53.8%)	10 (38.5%)
	Has used a library	15 (31.3%)	27 (56.3%)	6 (12.5%)
Number of children***	Mean number of children	1.71	1.79	0.33
Current Employment	Part-time/self-employed/placement	1 (10%)	7 (70%)	2 (20%)
	Unemployed	7 (25%)	17 (60.7%)	4 (14.3%)
	Employed Full-time	9 (23.1%)	18 (46.2%)	12 (30.8%)
Motivation for Adult Education	For money or job-related reasons	10 (28.6%)	18 (51.4%)	7 (20%)
	For the sake of learning	2 (10%)	11 (55%)	7 (35%)
	For family-related reasons	4 (28.6%)	9 (64.3%)	1 (7.1%)
	No motivation	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%)

- $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$ *** $p<.001$

Differences Among Counties

In order to assess the adequacy of our sample, we examined demographic differences across the participating counties in the study. Distributions were equivalent across counties for gender (χ^2 (6) = 9.69, NS), marital status (χ^2 (6) = 6.11, NS), home ownership (χ^2 (6) = 5.25, NS), library usage (χ^2 (6) = 8.96, NS), and years of schooling (F (6, 75) = 0.74, NS).

There were some noteworthy differences in sample characteristics across counties. KTAP recipients were more commonly found in Eastern counties than in

other counties in the study (χ^2 (6) = 27.58, p< 001). There was a difference between counties in terms of number of children, F (6, 73) = 3.44, p< 01, although post hoc Tukey comparisons did not indicate significant between county differences. Nevertheless, an examination of the data suggested that participants in West 3 County (mean = 0.42 children) had fewer children than did participants in East 2 (Mean = 2.69) and East 1 (Mean = 1.89) counties.

Motivation to Attend Adult Education

Participants' were probed regarding their motivation to attend adult education programs. Responses were coded into five categories: (1) attending for financial or job-related reasons, (2) attending purely for the sake of learning, (3) attending for family-related reasons, and (4) no indication of any motivation to attend. One participant indicated that it would be socially desirable to attend adult education classes, however, that participant was not included in this set of analyses.

There were no differences in motivation to attend adult education by county (χ^2 (18) = 21.87, NS), age (F (3, 70) = 2.42, NS), years of schooling (F (3, 71) = 0.30, NS), number of children (F (3, 72) = 0.22, NS), marital status (χ^2 (3) = 5.76, NS), home ownership (χ^2 (3) = 2.65, NS), and whether or not respondents were KTAP recipients (χ^2 (3) = 2.27, NS), whether or not friends or family members have attended adult education programs (χ^2 (3) = 0.51, NS), and whether or not the county was a low or high-unemployment county (χ^2 (3) = 0.93, NS).

Current employment status was broken down into three categories: employed full-time, unemployed, or other (part-time employment, job placement, self-employed, etc.). Current employment status was unrelated to motivation (χ^2 (6) = 4.57, NS), and was unrelated to having had friends or relatives who attended adult education programs (χ^2 (2) = 1.37, NS).

There were gender differences in motivation to attend adult education programs, (χ^2 (3) = 9.63 p<.05). Females (73.3%) were more likely than males (26.7%) to indicate that they were motivated to attend for family-related reasons, whereas males (76.2%) were more likely than females (23.8%) to indicate that they were motivated to attend merely for the sake of learning. In addition, males (61.1%) were somewhat more likely than females (38.9%) to report being motivated to attend for job-related purposes.

Participants also were asked about deterrents to participation. Responses were coded into six categories: (1) job-related time constraints, (2) child-related time constraints, (3) other types of time constraints, (4) cost or transportation issues, (5) confidence, and (6) no or other reasons.

Deterrents were unrelated to county (^{2} (30) = 26.07, NS), marital status (^{2} (5) = 5.95, NS), home ownership (^{2} (5) = 6.29, NS), number of children (F (5, 71) = 1.67, NS), age (F (5, 69) = 1.08, NS), or years of schooling, (F (5, 70) = 0.72, NS), and whether or not the county was a low or high-unemployment county (^{2} (5) = 2.40, NS).

Deterrents were related to gender, (^{2} (5) = 14.87, p< .01). Job-related time constraints were more typical for males (78.9%) than for females (21.1%), whereas child-related constraints were more typical for females (90%) than for males (10%). Concerns about confidence were more typical for males (66.7%) than for females (33.3%).

Deterrents also were related to whether or not participants received KTAP (^{2} (5) = 15.47, p< .01). Cost and transportation were greater deterrents for KTAP recipients (75%) than for non-recipients (25%), whereas job-related time constraints were greater concerns for non-recipients (84.2%) than for recipients (15.8%).

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